

**UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL**

**TEACHING READING: A LIFE HISTORY STUDY OF  
TWO ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATORS IN A RURAL  
PRIMARY SCHOOL IN KWAZULU-NATAL.**

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**Teaching reading: a life history study of two English  
language educators in a rural primary school in  
KwaZulu-Natal.**

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## **DECLARATION**

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this dissertation is my original work, except where otherwise indicated, and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any other university for a degree.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

**RAKESH SIVNARAIN**

**MAY 2013**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The study aimed to investigate the reading life histories of two educators, focusing on how they were taught to read and came to understand reading, and how this understanding has shaped their teaching of reading in the classroom. Two language educators teaching English in the Intermediate and Senior Phase in a rural primary school in KwaZulu-Natal were chosen for this research. A life history approach was undertaken to gather rich data which was analysed and presented in a life history narrative.

The research revealed that the participants' educational development was severely affected by poverty, violence and the repercussions of apartheid, which all had a negative impact on their education. In spite of this, the participants' were taught to value reading from an early age by concerned adults in their lives. These adults, although not highly educated themselves, actively instilled early reading habits in the participants, and tried to ensure that they were given the opportunity to be educated so that they could aspire to a better life. The participants' experiences of learning to read and reading in primary school and high school gave them only a limited understanding of reading and reading practices. The tertiary institutions where they trained as teachers failed to equip them with adequate skills and strategies to teach reading well in their own classrooms. As a result, although both educators believe that they were well trained, they lack adequate strategies for truly effective development of reading in their classrooms. Consequently, they fail to facilitate sound reading skills in their learners, yet are not fully aware of the shortcomings in their own practice.

## **ACRONYMS**

<b>ABET</b>	- Adult Basic Education Training
<b>ACE</b>	- Advanced Certificate in Education
<b>ANA</b>	- Annual National Assessment
<b>ESL</b>	- English Second Language
<b>FLP</b>	- Family Literacy Project
<b>LoLT</b>	- Language of Learning and Teaching
<b>MKO</b>	- More Knowledgeable Other
<b>PIRLS</b>	- Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
<b>SA</b>	- South Africa
<b>UKZN</b>	- University of KwaZulu-Natal
<b>UNISA</b>	- University of South Africa
<b>ZPD</b>	- Zone of Proximal Development

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## **CHAPTER 1**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Background to study**

This chapter briefly outlines the motivation for this study. The main focus was to explore the life history of two language educators teaching reading in English at a rural primary school. This study is part of the second phase of a broader action research project that focuses on the teaching of reading at a foundational level among both adults (ABET Levels 1 and 2) and the learners (Grade R - 7) in both IsiZulu and English at an education centre in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN). The focus includes the current reading practices, contexts and levels of performance of educators' reading and teaching of reading. This study will focus on the reading life histories of two language educators and how they teach reading in English to their Grade 6 and 7 classes in a rural primary school in KZN.

The study involves an in-depth analysis of their reading life histories, focusing on how they were taught to read and came to understand reading, and how this understanding has shaped their teaching of reading in the classroom. The study shares the same objective as the broader research project which is to build a culture of reading and to promote a greater awareness of the processes involved when developing the learners' reading skills. It is my hope that this will result in positive developments in attitudes towards reading, and greater understanding of the development of reading skills, and their application in working towards educational goals and reading enjoyment. It will be fascinating to study their lives as single subjects, to understand their life histories and to map their reading lives from their early journey into education, up to and including their present educational training as teachers.

## **1.2 Rationale**

The motivation of this study comes from my observations of my grade 8 classes. I am an educator in a high school teaching English to English Second Language (ESL) learners. The level of reading skills amongst these learners is very poor. When learners are asked to read aloud, they are hesitant and when they make an attempt they encounter numerous challenges in understanding what they have read. They have difficulty pronouncing words and their interest in reading is very low. When asked to read silently and then report on what they have read, they cannot give me a clear response as to what they have read. It is part of human nature to enjoy doing what one is good at, and being good at what they enjoy, so it is hardly surprising that these learners have low interest in reading as they are not competent at it. While they are able to decode, in other words translate text into spoken language, to an extent, their level of comprehending is very weak.

The major reason why I am interested in researching reading in the lower grades is because I want to understand how language teachers teach reading. Hence this research focuses on Grade 6 and grade 7 language educators' reading life histories. I will focus specifically on how they were taught to read, how they were trained including their experiences of the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) reading workshops to teach reading and how this shapes their present teaching of reading in their classroom.

## **1.3 Key research questions**

The research will aim to answer the following research questions.

- What are these intermediate and senior phase educators' experiences of learning reading?
- How were these teachers trained to teach reading?
- What strategies do these teachers use to teach reading?

- How does participation in the UKZN Reading Project influence the teachers' understanding of teaching reading?

#### **1.4 Ethical issues**

Several ethical considerations were addressed in this research to ensure trustworthiness of the study and the protection of the participants. Questions concerning anonymity and confidentiality are particularly pertinent for this research. The teachers were assured that all information from the interviews is confidential, and names and revealing details are changed. Informed consent was obtained from all participants. The purpose and the aim of the study was clearly explained to all participants to ensure their familiarity with the research. Participants were assured that no harm to them or their organization will be jeopardized in any way and no pressure was put on them to take part or continue taking part if they had become at all uncomfortable at any point of the study.

#### **1.5 Research design and methodology**

This study is a qualitative one within the interpretivist paradigm. Qualitative design allows for an in-depth analysis of data. Furthermore it accommodates 'why' questions (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000). "The social meanings people attribute to their experiences, circumstances, and situations, as well as the meanings people embed into texts and other objects, are the focus of qualitative research" (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 4). The interpretive paradigm helps to understand how people make meaning of the world, and thus accommodates this study of how these educators understand reading and teaching of it.

This study adopts a life history methodology, which uses in-depth interview methods that, "gather, analyze, and interpret the stories people tell about their lives. The researcher works closely with the participant, explores a story and records it"

(Riessman, 1993). Life history does not only entail information that individuals relate about their entire lives but can focus only on a part of it. The area of focus of my study is the participants' experience of learning to read and learning to teach reading, and how these experiences influence their teaching of reading.

To undertake the above research the following methods of gathering data were utilized. Two language teachers were purposefully selected, from grade 6 and 7. The study used semi-structured open-ended interviews. This type of interview involves "a set of preset questions which initiate the discussion, followed by further questions which arise from the discussion. This style of interviewing allows for more flexibility during data collection" (Rule & John, 2011, p. 65). This type of interview allows for the participants to communicate to me their detailed life experiences relating to reading in general, especially how they learnt to read and were trained to teach children to read, and how this has impacted on their teaching reading currently in their classrooms.

Observations of the educators are paramount to help me gain an insightful understanding of how they actually teach reading. An observation schedule was used. The observations were semi-structured in that the researcher was able to make informed decisions on what information from these observations was salient.

Observation methods are more than just looking. It is looking (often systematically) and noting systematically (always) people, events, behaviours, settings, routines and so on. The distinctive feature of observation as a research process is that it offers an investigator the opportunity to gather 'live' data from naturally occurring social situations. In this way, the researcher can look directly at what is taking place *in situ* rather than relying on second-hand accounts (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011, p. 456).

## **1.6 Background of the UKZN Reading Project**

The study is part of a wider reading project run in the School of Education of the University of KwaZulu-Natal, under which a number of studies are grouped. This reading research project was undertaken at a rural primary school in KwaZulu-Natal. The aim was to stimulate and support the development of a reading culture among adults and children in a school-based learning community. The reading research project set out to answer the following questions:

1. What are the reading contexts, practices and resources of foundation level learners at this primary school?
2. What are the characteristic ways in which adults and children are taught how to read at a foundation level? What materials (language, level, medium and content) are used to do this?
3. How do educators understand their roles as teachers of reading? What are their own reading habits and experiences?
4. What is the level of reading competence of adults and children at a foundation level?

The project aimed to identify intervention strategies that would contribute towards:

1. Identifying and implementing methods to optimize the reading of adult and children learners.
2. Fostering a culture of reading in the school, among its educators and learners?
3. Support for reading development in learners' homes.

## **1.7 Preview of chapters that follow**

### **Chapter 2: Literature review**

This chapter provides a review of literature on the development of reading skills and factors that generally affect the learning and teaching of reading in a South African context. It discusses literature that relates to developing reading comprehension, vocabulary, fluency and other aspects which promote reading for meaning. The chapter also establishes a theoretical framework for the study, drawing on The Landscape Model and the Constructivist Theory of Vygotsky.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

This chapter outlines the methodological framework within which the research was conducted. It gives an overview of the style of research selected, the paradigm and type of approach used. It describes the various methods that were used to collect data. It explains the sampling style, selection of site, how the data was analysed and interpreted. Lastly it discusses the limitations and ethical aspects of the study.

### **Chapter 4: Findings of the study**

This chapter concentrates on the data collected from the responses of the participants during the interview process as well as from the observation of their classroom teaching. It looks at the experiences of two English educators with regard to their life history of how they were taught to read and the training they were exposed to that equipped them to teach reading in their classrooms.



## **Chapter 5: Discussion of findings**

The themes emerging from information gained are examined in conjunction with the key research questions and are evaluated in terms of the literature review and theoretical framework.

## **Chapter 6: Conclusion and recommendations**

The findings are summarised in this chapter. Conclusions drawn are presented and recommendations for further research in this field are suggested. The chapter concludes with an overview of this study.

### 2.1. Introduction

“The desire to read is not born in a child. It is planted by parents and teachers” (Trelease, 2001). Trelease’s statement highlights the key role parents and teachers play in improving children’s reading skills, the life blood of human intelligence. For society to prosper, we need a nation that is both literate and competent to compete in the global arena. For this reason teachers play a crucial role in equipping learners with reading skills that would be beneficial in leading a constructive life. South Africa after 19 years of democracy still features dismally amongst the rest of the world when it comes to literacy and numeracy. Our learners are simply way behind the rest of the world when it comes to literacy (Kennedy, Martin, Mullis & Sainsbury, 2006, p. 18).

This chapter explores literature that has enhanced my understanding of how teaching reading for meaning could be enhanced by the educators in Grade 6 and Grade 7 in a rural primary school in KwaZulu-Natal. The impact of this literature helps to bolster understanding on how these educators’ reading life histories prepared them to teach reading. Before I explore more literature on reading, it is beneficial that I first define reading. The following definitions are included as they are pertinent to this study.

### 2.2. Defining reading

“Reading is both a cognitive-linguistic ability as well as a socially constructed form of human behaviour. From a cognitive-linguistic point of view, reading utilizes several component knowledge structures and processes that interact rapidly and simultaneously during reading” (Matjila & Pretorius, 2004, p. 4).

“Whereas basic reading skills concern the identification of letters and words in a text, higher order skills concern the understanding of concepts and ideas conveyed by the

text. In the context of learning, comprehension entails the identification of the meaning of the text as a connected whole rather than a series of individual words and sentences” (Espin et al., 2007, p. 292).

“According to the National Reading Panel good readers activate prior knowledge; constantly evaluate whether their reading goals are being met; frequently formulate predications and make inferences, and read selectively” (National Reading Panel, 2000, p. 28).

“Reading is a complex process. It is not just about identifying words but it is also about understanding them. The process is not a one-way street – first we decode (translate the print into) the words, then we make sense of them. It is interactive. The sense of what we are reading sometimes helps us with the decoding – we anticipate words” (Bielby, 1999, p. 2).

“Reading enables us to move beyond the confines of our own thinking, while reading, we can leave our own consciousness, and pass over into the consciousness of another person, another time, another culture ... our original boundaries are challenged, teased and gradually placed somewhere new” (Wolf, 2008, pp. 7-8).

“The ability to understand and use those written language forms required by society and /or valued by the individual. Young readers can construct meaning from a variety of texts. They read to learn, to participate in communities of readers in school and everyday life, and for enjoyment” (Mullis et al., 2006, p. 3).

“The reader brings to the text his or her past memories, thoughts and experiences and present personality and together these crystallize into a new experience” (Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 30).

### **2.3. Reading levels in South Africa**

South Africa’s (SA) current literacy levels are a cause for major concern. Results from the most recent Annual National Assessment (ANA) (Department of Basic Education,

2012) show that 18,8% of Grade 3 learners scored less than 29% in the ANA examinations. These learners performed very poorly taking into consideration that this test was administered in their mother tongue literacy. On the other hand 30.3% of Grade 6 learners scored less than 29% in the ANA test and this test was administered in English which is their First Additional Language. Likewise 43.1% of Grade 6 learners scored less than 29% in their Home Language ANA tests. These 2012 ANA results illustrate how badly our learners' are performing in literacy. Although there is a slight improvement in the 2012 results as compared to the results in 2011, there are indications that the ANA tests of 2012 were easier than those of 2011 (De Waal, 2013, p. 4).

The ANA tests (Department of Education, 2011) conducted in the Foundation Phase (Grades 1 to 3) were conducted in their home language, meaning different versions of the test in all eleven official languages were developed. Grade 4 to 6 tests were conducted in English and Afrikaans only (Annual National Assessment, 2011). The findings of the ANA assessment support the urgent need for intervention strategies to be prioritized in order to address SA's poor literacy levels. One of the glaring factors that is creating this scenario is that children who speak an indigenous African language at home have their mother tongue up to Grade 3 as their Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT) and they switch to English as the LoLT from Grade 4 onwards.

This abrupt transition to English as LoLT has not been without its challenges. "In 1990 the Threshold report (Macdonald, 1990) laid bare the inadequacies of an education system that failed to support the linguistic and conceptual challenges that black primary school children faced when they made the transition from their primary language to English as the language of learning and teaching. Now, ten years later, the same author considers the LoLT of black primary school children to see whether the linguistic and conceptual challenges facing these children have been met under the new educational dispensation. The author argues that weaknesses in the new curriculum, at both a theoretical and a practical level, have led to the neglect of basic literacy and numeracy development in the Foundation and Intermediate Phases" (Macdonald, 2002, p. 111).

There are various factors that impede SA's capabilities to promote literacy (the study focuses on children English literacy skills). The National Reading Strategy (Department of Education, 2008) indicates that the poor literacy rates in SA are related to its past educational inequalities and poor socio-economic conditions. "The whole intellectual accomplishment of reading is influenced by the social environment in which individuals grow up and enact their daily lives, where home, school, community and larger socioeconomic and political factors impact on the functions that reading serves, the attitudes and values attached to it and the way in which it is developed in institutions charged with its instruction and development" (Pretorius, 2010, p. 348). Van Staden (2011) indicates that poor socio-economic conditions are associated with the following factors, "prior knowledge and skills; impoverished language experiences both at home and at school; lack of resources such as libraries, reading material and newspapers; lack of essential support of parents/caregivers at home; parents' low English literacy levels" (p.12).

When results of the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) 2006 were released in November 2007, the results were devastating. The test results indicated that South African learners are faced with reading problems irrespective of the language in which they read. Forty countries participated in this test and SA was placed last. PIRLS 2006 tests were carried out in all South African official languages. Many Grade 4 learners undertook this test in their First Additional Language as this is their home language and was the medium of instruction in their foundation phase. The score results were dismal with South Africa scoring 302 points. In comparison, the top three countries scored 565 (Russian Federation), 564 (Canada) and 558 (Luxembourg) points respectively (PIRLS, 2006, p. 18).

"In the PIRLS 2006 test, the following four aspects in comprehension were tested, namely, a reader's ability to retrieve explicitly stated (literal) information from a text, make straightforward inferences from information given in a text, integrate ideas and information across the text and examine and evaluate the text. The international norm showed that 94% of learners could answer questions that required the retrieval of explicitly stated information. In contrast, in SA only 12% of Grade 4 learners could

answer questions at the first, literal level. In other words, 78% of this country's Grade 4 learners did not meet minimum comprehension standards, and they could not answer such questions when reading in the African languages" (Lephalala & Pretorius, 2011, pp. 1-2). These results, showing learners' inadequacy in comprehending what they are reading, are shocking and show the disastrous state of education in South Africa.

SA's youth are the future of this country; they will play a crucial role in the country's social and economic prosperity. In other words they hold the key for SA to compete in the global economy. As Caldwell (2004) crisply suggests, "The key to such prosperity at both the individual and national level is the provision of quality schooling. The global economic, technological and social changes underway requiring responses from an increasingly skilled workforce make high quality schooling an imperative" (Caldwell, 2004, p. 4). Caldwell's argument reiterates our concern regarding the low levels of literacy in South Africa. To compete globally the country needs competent and highly literate individuals.

## **2.4. Theoretical and conceptual framework**

I have selected two theories to provide a framework for this research. The first theory is *The Landscape Model* (Rapp & van den Broek, 2005). This theory concentrates on how to teach reading for meaning. The second theory is known as *Social Constructivism Theory* (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky's theory in this research will concentrate particularly on how the teachers developed their teaching skills.

### **2.4.1. The landscape model**

"Memory-based and constructionist processes are the essential components of the Landscape Model. Together these processes are responsible for the activation of concepts and the establishment of meaningful connections between concepts during reading" (Kendeou, Rapp & van den Broek, 2005, p. 299). These authors argue that

there are two main domains that are vital in teaching reading, namely “*memory-based and constructionist processes*.” Both these processes are explicitly interconnected in the Landscape Model and are discussed below.

#### **2.4.2. Memory-based view processes**

According to this view as a reader reads a text, “information in the text and other information that is activated in the working memory, will trigger a spread of activation through the reader’s knowledge base, activating associated information. This spread of activation can occur through the episodic memory representation that the reader has constructed of the text so far as well as through his or her semantic (background) knowledge” (Kendeou, Rapp & van den Broek., 2005, p. 301). “From a *memory based perspective*, each word, phrase, or concept that a reader processes triggers an automatic spread of activation to other, related words and concepts in memory for the text read so far and background knowledge” (Rapp & van den Broek, 2005, p. 276).

#### **2.4.3. Constructionist view processes**

According to this view, “readers of text have explicit and implicit goals they actively tend to fulfill when they read. These goals are referred to or labeled as a *search/effort after meaning*. Readers use their prior knowledge from past texts, their developing memory representation of the text and decoding of the print in an attempt to achieve these goals” (Kendeou, Rapp & van den Broek, 2005, p. 301). As the reader progresses through the text they decode the text and they reconstruct meaningful language from it. Whilst this process is occurring the readers are constructing pictures in their minds to make meaning of the text. This process allows the reader to make understanding of their present sentence by analyzing the sentences of the text by looking at the previous sentence, the current sentence and at the same time their memories are activated and

also their background knowledge comes into operation to make meaning of the sentence.

The processes described above are important for understanding reading. “These two processes dynamically interact, borrowing from, supporting, and possibly, conflicting with each other. In other words these two processes form the core of reading. The Landscape Model is a theoretical framework in which these two sets of processes are integrated” (Kendeou, Rapp & van den Broek, 2005, p. 301).

“These authors conclude that memory-based text processing is a powerful variable in determining the availability of information during reading. Likewise readers frequently engage in constructionist processes aimed at creating meaning. Readers tend to reactivate information from prior processing cycles when this information contributes to the understanding of the text. Readers therefore often reactivate information when it contributes or is necessary for, implementing strategies to facilitate comprehension” (Kendeou, Rapp & van den Broek, 2005, p. 301). It must also be borne in mind that not all readers will be able to efficiently incorporate both these processes effectively. There are numerous reasons for this, some of the reasons could be because of their exposure to abject poverty, lack of resources and limited literacy practices in the home and limited exposure to print material. Kendeou, Rapp & van den Broek (2005) claim that if learners are exposed to a rich literate learning environment they will be able to perform academically.

#### **2.4.4. The landscape model of reading comprehension**

The Landscape Model conceptualizes both processes (memory-based and constructionist processes) that contribute to reading with meaning. According to Kendeou, Rapp & van den Broek (2005) the Landscape Model assumes that the reader progresses through a text in reading cycles, each reading cycle involving the reader decoding the print and making meaning of the words. The reader progresses to make meaning of the language that they are reconstructing from the print, as they do this,



they add their own background knowledge to it. Whilst the reader progresses memories begin to flicker in their minds. This is activated from four different sources of information: the current processing cycle, and the meaning that the reader has begun to construct of it; the preceding cycle and the meaning that reader has constructed of that; the current episodic text representation and the meaning of that in the reader's short term memory; and reader's back ground knowledge from longer term memory.

As the reader advances through each reading cycle, distinct concepts are activated and these concepts are attached as nodes to the episodic memory representation of the text. If the concept is already part of this text representation it leads to the concept being reactivated and its trace being strengthened. Similarly if co-activation of concepts occurs; this leads to the connections of the concepts being strengthened. "The resulting network representation influences subsequent activation patterns. These cyclical and dynamically fluctuating activations lead to the gradual emergence of an episodic memory representation or discourse model of the text, in which textual propositions and inferences are connected via semantic relations (such as casual links). Hence this model captures the fluctuations of concepts during reading. The resulting memory representation is the product of iterative and reciprocal relations between fluctuations of activations and the episodic text representation" (Kendeou, Rapp & van den Broek, 2005, p. 306).

Two other mechanisms are also responsible for the source of activation in this model. The first mechanism is known as *cohort activation*. The *cohort activation* comes into effect when a concept is activated during reading; it tends to attract all other concepts that are currently activated, which are associated with it. These concepts attract each other and are connected to form a *cohort*. This mechanism is memory-based and relies on background knowledge. The second mechanism is known as *coherence-based retrieval*. This mechanism strategically retrieves information that helps the reader to meet their reading goals:

These retrievals can emanate from different spectrums, it can be from an episodic text representation, from background knowledge, or from the text

itself. Therefore, coherence-based retrieval is equivalent to search/effort after meaning mechanisms described by the constructionist view of reading. The Landscape Model depicts a dynamic interaction of both memory-based and constructionist processes (Kendeou, Rapp & van den Broek, 2005, p. 307).

It is important that we look at how the Bottom-up approach and the Top-down approach feature in this model. In order to relate to how these approaches are integrated we look at the reason behind why memory-based and constructionist processes may be seen as opposition to one another. The model attempts to relate memory-based processes with *bottom-up processing* and constructionist processes with *top-down processing*.

Bottom-up views traditionally describe stimulus-driven processes that do not necessitate higher order cognition. Top-down views traditionally rely on background knowledge and existing memory representations to mediate the interpretations of stimuli. Therefore memory-based views are not direct analogs of bottom-up processing. These views argue that information in memory is activated to a large degree by elements of a text, thereby assigning an important role to pre-existing memory representations, including organized knowledge such as scripts and schemas. Thus, memory based views to some degree require top-down information (for example, concepts in prior knowledge that will be activated broadly) to account for relevant activation processes. In a similar sense, constructionist views are not direct analogs of top-down processing. In text comprehension, expectations or preferences on the part of the reader must interact with the actual words being perceived; top-down processing is affected directly by bottom-up processing. Thus, both memory-based and constructionist views rely on combination of bottom-up and top-down processing (Kendeou, Rapp & van den Broek, 2005, p. 312).

Thus the Landscape Model incorporates both the top-down and the bottom-up approaches, integrated in its memory-based and constructionist processes. These processes work together in an interactive manner that enables the learners to read with understanding. This theory will aid our understanding of teaching reading and it aims to highlight information that is pertinent in understanding the child's cognitive development in learning to read. The theory sheds light on how reading for meaning can be taught.

## **2.5. Social constructivism theory**

The second theory that will be used as a lens in this research is known as Social Constructivism Theory (Vygotsky, 1978). This theory provides an important framework for studying human behaviour in relationship to the social environment. It encompasses adult-young child interactions in shared literacy activities:

It is an elementary tenet of Vygotskian theory, that in order to fathom the inner mental processes of human beings, we need to observe human beings in their socio-cultural contexts. Vygotsky proposed that we should not look for the explanation of human behavior in the depths of the brain or the soul but in the external living conditions of persons and most of all, in the external conditions of their societal life - in their social-historical forms of existence (Luria, 1979, p. 23).

Vygotsky's theory helps us to understand how a person cognitively develops through their interaction with their social environment. This research looks at the lives of two educators', how they were raised and how their social environment impacted on their educational development. Therefore Vygotsky's theory will be useful to analyse the educators' development in relation to their social experiences.

Vygotsky is well known for his seminal in research and theory in developmental cognition. It was through his research that he developed the Social Development Theory. His theory emphasises the primary role that social interaction has in the

evolution of cognition (Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1991). He felt strongly that the community played a pivotal role in the process of “making meaning”. Vygotsky argued that “learning is a necessary and universal aspect of the process of developing culturally organized, specifically human psychological function” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 90). In order to have an understanding of Vygotsky’s theories on cognitive development, one must be aware of the two main principles of Vygotsky’s work. The first principle is known as the More Knowledgeable Other (MKO) and the second principle is known as the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD).

### **2.5.1. More knowledgeable other**

Vygotskian theory on learning states that children will not learn naturally on their own but will learn with the aid of someone more knowledgeable who can guide and assist in their learning. *The More Knowledgeable Other (MKO)* can relate to someone who has a better understanding or a higher development level than the child as they are able to understand the learner’s capabilities and offer their guidance and assistance in aiding the child to reach their learning outcome. *The more knowledgeable other* can be a teacher, peer or an adult. The teacher or the adult aids in scaffolding the child until they reach their learning outcome. In essence the *MKO* “arranges the environment and creates a scaffold so that the learner is able to attain a higher or more abstract perspective on the learning task” (Krauss, 1996, p. 61). In relation to the two participants the *MKO* can either be their parents, older siblings, other family members or a teacher who guided and assisted them when they were children. In relation to this study, people who were instrumental in teaching these two participants how to read and develop them academically whilst they were growing up would have shaped their attitudes towards and understanding of reading. Teachers learn about teaching from their training in educational institutions and also from other teachers in their school. They do this through observing other teachers in and out of the classroom, through discussion with them, and through the ethos and traditions and practices of the school. Thus, when collecting data for this research it is important to find out from the participants how they were taught to teach in the classroom and if they had a mentor

who assisted and guided them until they were able to teach on their own. This mentor would have been their *MKO* who scaffolded them when they were novice teachers.

### **2.5.2. The zone of proximal development**

The concept More Knowledgeable Other (MKO) is associated with Vygotsky's second important principle, known as The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Both these principles are important because they are complementary in the scaffolding aspect of the child's cognitive development. Vygotsky (1978) defines the ZPD as the distance between the "actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (p .86).

Krauss (1996) claims that the ZPD is the domain in which individuals can attain their goals with the assistance and direction of the MKO. Therefore the ZPD incorporates the individual's level of development and the form of instruction, which helps determine the individual's ability in seeking help, their interaction with the immediate environment and the manner in which they raise questions. The *knowledgeable one* has to be aware of the individual's level of maturation and how they are going to assist the individual to make meaning of something they don't understand. *The knowledgeable one* has to make decisions about how they are going to formulate instructions to assist the individual (Krauss, 1996). These instructions are important because they precede development. For instance when one builds a house, scaffolding precedes the building because it aids in providing short-term and versatile support. Likewise when parents interact with their children they are scaffolding and constantly monitoring their children's progress. In the classroom environment, preferably the teacher is the *knowledgeable other* or is able to identify other learners who can undertake such a role.

A teacher who is acquainted with the ZPD will be able to set the environment and construct a scaffold so that students are able to acquire an elevated or more intellectual position on the learning task. Learners gain from the alertness of the *more*

*knowledgeable other*, who is aware of the learners' present potentials, their learning aims, and the way in which to guide the learners to reach their goals (Krauss, 1996). Similarly the participants gained crucial knowledge as they were taught to become educators in tertiary institutions with the aid of their lecturers who scaffolded them until they were able to perform the tasks on their own. Although they were guided and assisted through their learning processes not all educators are able to function in a manner that is expected from them as taught by their *MKO*. The participants also learn from their colleagues in school. They watch their peers to see how they teach and sometimes they adapt their style of teaching. Their interaction with children also affects their teaching and they develop or change their style of teaching to meet the demands or allowances of the learning environment.

Learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in co-operation with his peers. Once these processes are internalized they become part of the child's independent developmental achievement (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 90).

In this case the teacher in the classroom as a 'more knowledgeable other' helps to scaffold the child during their developmental stages. For instance, an adult reading a story to a child is functioning in the child's zone of proximal development. In this process, there are things that the child may already know (for example, the concept of a story, pictures and their relation to the story, or picture - print connections). Teaching to the level at which the child is ready to learn would be, according to Vygotsky, "teaching to yesterday's development" (p.89). "In areas the child has not yet reached developmentally, the adults act as a 'mediator' between the child and the text as the child cannot function alone (for example, being able to predict, relating experiences to the text, and so on)" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 90).

This research will use the above-mentioned theory to explain the participants' development in terms of understanding reading and the way it should be taught.

Vygotsky's theory on Social Constructivism will be beneficial when unpacking the participants' reading life histories based on how they learnt to understand reading, what training they acquired to teach reading, how they see reading, and how they understand how it should be taught.

## **2.6. The reading process**

It is crucial that the Reading Process is discussed in order to understand how children are taught to read. 'The reading process', refers to the way one makes sense of print, translating the black marks on the page into meaning. The way we make sense of print as adults is the sophisticated end-product of a long and complex learning process that began before we entered school and continued beyond the primary years. The child's primary years of schooling are the crucial stage where the main components of learning to read are taught (Bielby, 1999, p. 1). In order for a child to learn to read effectively in their primary level, their past interaction with educational activities is important. Bielby's explanation points to the challenges that face our children in schools when it comes to learning to read. Many SA children come from homes where they are not exposed to much print material and families tend to have very limited literacy practices.

An evaluation of the Family Literacy Project (FLP) (2011) carried out in rural sites in the southern Drakensberg indicated that,

Poverty, lack of resources, teenage pregnancy, and as statistics show, AIDS are common features of life in these areas. Many homes do not have electricity, and many are female-headed (often by grandmothers). There are very few signs of literacy in the public domain. When FLP team visited homes they observed that books and print material were mainly school books and notes, and texts related to church. The learner profiles also reveal that in terms of education, 37% of the adults involved with the

FLP attended school for 3 years or less, and only 8% reached the last years of senior school (Land & Lyster, 2011, p. 7).

The above scenario is likely to reflect the reality in most rural areas in South Africa, since the area in which this evaluation was done shares many characteristics with other rural areas. Literacy-related learning only happens in school. Literacy for fun is not developed at home. Consequently educators have in their classes children who are faced with literacy problems because of their very limited exposure to literacy practices prior to them entering school. This leads to their reading development in primary school being compromised in relation to children who experience rich preschool engagement in literacy practices, and effective educators have to find ways of compensating for this.

### **2.6.1 Reading comprehension**

Before teaching children or adults to read it is vital that educators have a good idea of what is meant by the term “reading comprehension”. This will help to ensure what is being taught actually achieves its goal. “Reading comprehension is described and situated within a socio-cognitive model of literacy, in which reading is viewed as a highly complex phenomenon comprising many cognitive-linguistic skills and component processes that tap into various knowledge bases, all of which are embedded within a social matrix. The act of reading is thus both an individual cognitive-linguistic accomplishment, as well as socially constituted practice” (Lephalala & Pretorius, 2011, pp. 2-3). What these authors are asserting is that when the learner is reading the text, they use their cognitive ability and their social background to make meaning. This aspects links to the Landscape Model. The Landscape model encapsulates both the memory-based (cognitive domain) and the constructionist processes (social matrix) to help the learner make meaning of the text. As pointed out by Block & Pressley (2007, p. 235), reading meaningfully is a “habit of mind we want students to internalize and use forever”.



The cognitive-linguistic aspect of reading is broken down into four main components, namely *decoding*, *comprehension*, *response* and *metalinguistic/metacognitive knowledge*. The four main components are briefly described below.

#### **2.6.1.1. Decoding**

Lephalala & Pretorius (2011) claim that decoding involves identifying print symbols and codes and translating them into language. Decoding promotes a reader to recognize and identify words rapidly and accurately. Fluency evolves as the reader is able to decode accurately. Fluency is an important aspect between decoding and comprehension. According to Moats (1999) decoding is linked to lower level reading skills where the reader uses the knowledge of sound-letter relationships of the alphabetic writing system. This allows the reader to rapidly link sounds and symbols unconsciously.

Decoding enables comprehension, if learners find it difficult to decode a text, then their understanding of comprehension is weakened. Decoding skills involves both internal factors such as children's phonemic awareness and central processing mechanisms as well as external factors which consist of teaching methods, exposure to texts, motivation and encouragement to engage in reading. These factors help in judging the child's decoding development trajectories (Lephalala & Pretorius, 2011, pp. 3). Decoding is one of the most important principles in the reading process. In other words children develop this skill during their foundational years in primary school. Inadequate preparation in the child's decoding development is detrimental to the child's reading abilities.

#### **2.6.1.2. Comprehension**

Comprehension allows for meaning to be understood in the text. It contributes to the essence of reading, in other words while we read, "we construct an overall picture of

what the text is about, this is referred to as the mental model or text representation” (Lephalala & Pretorius, 2011, pp. 3). This aspect of the comprehension process is linked directly to the Landscape Model. While the learner is constructing meaning, the mental model is being constantly updated with the new incoming information from the text and the background knowledge that the reader brings to the reading process. This relates directly to the cycles of the Landscape Model. The learners ability “to resolve anaphors across sentences and paragraphs, make inferences, identify text macrostructures within different genres and use background knowledge to make sense of text are all aspects of comprehension” (Lephalala & Pretorius, 2011, pp. 3).

#### **2.6.1.3. Response**

Reading is not regarded as a neutral act. When we read a text we tend to react to it in some way ( for example, with elation, curiosity, boredom), that is to say when we read, our ‘affective dimension’ such as feelings, attitudes, perceptions and values are attached to the text. If the learners show enthusiasm in what they are reading, they will acquire some emotional and/or intellectual benefit from it (Lephalala & Pretorius, 2011, pp. 4).

#### **2.6.1.4. Metacognition**

“This is about awareness and regulation; it involves the ability to reflect on language and thinking and to act on them when required” (Lephalala & Pretorius, 2011, pp. 4). Readers can use metacognition in any aspect of their reading namely: decoding, comprehension or response aspects of reading. “Competent readers use metacognition to monitor their comprehension, to modify failed comprehension and to distribute attentional resources” (Lephalala & Pretorius, 2011, pp. 4).

The above mentioned components of reading that is decoding, comprehension and response should be part of a reading comprehension instructional programme that

focuses on these skills. It is imperative that it should be re-enforced to readers in their early reading stages.

## **2.7. Reading development sequence**

The social context in which children are raised impacts on their academic progress in school. Rose (2005) asserts that if children are supported at home and they are being read to by their parents these children will later flourish into independent readers. He highlights the difference in this “respect to the experience of parent-child reading, of which children in literate middle class families experience an average of 1000 hours before starting school whereas those from oral cultural backgrounds may experience little or none” (Rose, 2005, p. 138). What Rose (2005) is stating here is that if children had the advantage of being read to prior to their entrance to school they are more likely to succeed in school than learners who were not exposed to this. Hence parent-child reading before school is the first stage in a curriculum of reading skills.

Children who are fortunate to experience a thousand hours of pre-reading are in a better position to benefit most from the literacy practices of junior primary teaching, and rapidly learn to become independent readers (Rose, 2005). Pretorius (2002) is of the same opinion regarding children who come from oral backgrounds. She mentions the ‘Mathew effect’ whereby, as children work through the different stages of schooling they increasingly require the ability to independently learn from reading. If children do not have sufficient reading skills at the beginning of schooling they are likely to fall further and further behind students who have these skills. Poor readers read less and less. The result is that the already skilled readers get more and more of what they need, and the poor readers get less and less (Stanovich, 1986).

In the middle to upper primary level learners are learning to learn from reading, and to show their understanding of what they have learnt, they undergo a series of written assessment tasks. Here learners master the skills that are required in secondary schooling which includes independently learning from reading. Over time and practice

learners should become skillful in the art of independently learning from reading. Learners' interaction with secondary school texts successfully develops the "skills they will need in tertiary study for independently reading academic texts, and reproducing and interpreting what they have read in assignments" (Rose, 2005, p. 138).

Rose (2005) paints a perfect picture when he points out that ideally, learners are constantly supported through each of the reading development phases, from parent-child reading towards learning in junior primary which develops and extends the reading skills they have learnt from home. Upper primary school evaluates them on independent reading skills acquired in junior primary, and so on. We need to be realistic and understand the context in SA where many learners are not exposed to any print material. "Those learners that have acquired skills in each preceding stage are continually affirmed as 'able' in the next stage, while those learners who have not acquired the skills are evaluated as 'unable' (Rose, 2005, p. 138). Again Rose is highlighting the significance of children being exposed to print material at a very early age. The spotlight is no doubt on learners who have been exposed to the thousand hours of reading as being much more ahead than learners who have not been exposed to this reading. Rose's argument links directly to Vygotsky's theory on *Social Constructivism* where the emphasis is on the child being scaffolded by a *MKO* in helping the child to develop cognitively.

## **2.8. Different reading strategies**

Children need to be exposed to a range of different reading strategies. Learning different reading strategies aids in enhancing learners' abilities to become proficient readers. Teachers should use a variety of reading strategies to teach reading in the early years of schooling. The strategies described below are suggested by Rose, and are based on his research on reading. Rose (2005) has put together a very good programme for the development of reading skills. He works very closely with children in the junior primary to help them learn reading especially learners from disadvantaged backgrounds. The first reading strategy to be highlighted will be Shared Reading.

### **2.8.1. Shared reading**

In this strategy the teacher reads a children's book repeatedly over 2 or 3 weeks to the children. The teacher engages the children in the story until they understand it and they learn it so that they can recite almost every word in the story or part of it. They learn it until they can recite it on their own. Usually a big book is used as it allows for the children and the teacher to point to the words as they say them together. This strategy is partly modeled on parent-child reading practices, in which books are read repeatedly to enhance the children's understanding of and pleasure in the story. It promotes learners' engagement in the pleasure of reading. It is based in a "communal activity where the teacher is seen as a surrogate parent, affirming, supporting and encouraging the children" (Rose, 2005, p. 149). In terms of Vygotsky's *Social Constructivist Theory*, the parent or the teacher is seen as the *more knowledgeable other* who assists and guides the child in the learning process. They help to take the child from known to the unknown.

The beneficial aspect of this strategy is that it prepares junior primary children to become readers and at the same time promote the joy of reading for pleasure. It also aids them in acquiring meaningful constructs of communication devices. Literate family backgrounds establish a positive environment for parent-child reading that helps in their development as independent readers. On the other hand children from oral family backgrounds are able to engage in the pleasures and identities of reading for the first time (Rose, 2005, p. 149). In our SA context many children come from homes that are poverty stricken or offer very little exposure to print material. These children are disadvantaged when it comes to reading independently.

### **2.8.2. Recognising words**

The next important stage of detailed reading revolves around assisting children in *Recognising Words*. The teacher takes the first sentence of the story which the children have already been exposed to and writes it out on a cardboard strip. The teacher

together with the children point at each word and they say the sentence aloud. “The teacher and children then point at each word as they say them together, until each child can read the sentence accurately, pointing at and saying the words” (Rose, 2005, p. 150). The teacher initially goes over the sentence repeatedly and at the same time points at the words. Thereafter the teacher takes the child’s hand as they point and reads the sentence repeatedly. We can clearly see how Vygotsky’s theory plays a crucial role here. With this strategy accurate reading can be developed.

The teacher can test the children’s abilities by cutting up the words from the sentence and asking the learners to arrange them to recreate the sentence. “These activities firstly support young children to recognize the relation between written words as material objects and the meanings they express, and secondly to recognize graphic differences between each word in the sequence of meanings in a sentence. At this stage they need not recognize the spelling patterns of each word, but can differentiate between them by using visual clues such as first and last letters, supported by the sequence of the sentence” (Rose, 2005, p. 151). This strategy allows children to develop their sense to recognize letters and make meanings of the words. This section of the reading strategy is linked to the Landscape Model Theory. This model describes the processes that learners’ proceed through as they attempt to make meaning of the word. Here the teacher cuts out words from the sentence and the words are mixed. The children have to put the words back in the correct sequence to complete the sentence. During this strategy children make meaning of the words and at the same time memories flicker and this triggers the child’s past knowledge and the child adopts the constructionist process to put the sentence together correctly. The child is able to string along information from their past to enable them to identify and make understanding on what they are reading.

### **2.8.3. Spelling**

Having being able to recognize words in a sentence, they are ready for the next phase which is *Spelling*. This phase is the first step where the child moves from reading to

preparing for writing. In this stage the teacher cuts up the letters from the words into “letter patterns, including syllables and onset and rhyme patterns” (Rose, 2005, p. 151). Rose (2005) suggests that children practice writing each letter pattern first before attempting to write the whole word. “During each step children are encouraged to observe the letter pattern or word, write it from memory, and then check for themselves if they are correct, in order to learn how to do self-correction” (Rose, 2005, p. 151). Once again the Landscape Model is operating here in describing how children memorize the letter patterns of the words. As the children are reading the word they look at the letters and they try to put the word in context by remembering what they have just read.

Subsequently if children continue with this practice they will not only know the meanings of the words but also remember how to spell them. This skill of identifying letter patterns will also enable them to transfer this knowledge to recognize other words. Hence the sequence of acquisition thus far is from meaning to wording to lettering. This strategy helps children to interact with words they understand by putting them in their own sentences; the teacher supports them by writing words not spelt to complete their sentences. The child can practice writing out the sentence until they can construct it independently. This can lead to other sentences being constructed until a whole paragraph is constructed. This process allows children to write their own story from the stories they have been reading. Rose’s *Learning to Read* approach concentrates in teaching children how to read with emphasis on “making meaning in context as the starting point for teaching the components of the reading task in manageable steps” (Rose, 2005, p. 152). The Landscape model builds on the child’s ability to comprehend the text as a whole from a single word to a sentence to a paragraph and lastly the entire text. If educators in junior primary school adopt Rose’s *Learning to Read* strategies we will be able to mushroom a crop of independent readers.

## 2.9. Techniques for reading and writing in primary and junior secondary school

Once learners have adapted the strategies of *learning to read* in junior primary it is important that they now understand how to *read to learn* in primary and junior secondary schools. “In this phase of primary school the techniques for reading and writing provide learners with support to read with engagement and enjoyment, this helps them to develop identities as readers and to recognize and use literate language patterns in their own writing” (Rose, 2005, p. 153). During the first stage of reading which is referred to as *Preparing before Reading*, the teacher reads the story aloud, this is done to prepare the learners to follow the words with understanding. The teacher also supports by activating their background knowledge which will provide guidance in understanding the story. This aspect is linked to the Landscape model theory where the child activates his/her memory processes and links them to their constructionist processes to make meaning of the text.

Once learners have completed the Detailed Reading activities, they are now prepared for writing. Writing includes Sentence Making, Spelling, and Sentence Writing. We have seen that in the early years, learners make sentences by writing them on cardboard strips, in primary and junior secondary learners are exposed to more elaborate text they use a whole selected paragraph. The teacher helps the learners to “identify and cut out sentences into phrases, and then in words, put them back together, mix them up, rearrange them and construct new sentences with the cards” (Rose, 2005, p. 156). The same Detailed Reading strategy is used but this time less preparation is given to learners to identify words and groups. In groups learners cut up the sentences into phrases and then words and put them together, mix them up and create new sentences.

Rose’s reading strategies are beneficial to the learners in SA. They need intervention strategies that can build their competencies in reading and understanding meaning. Educators who teach in early primary years need to adopt these strategies in order to



equip the learners to read with meaning especially learners from disadvantaged backgrounds.

### 3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I provide an outline of the research methodology that was used to obtain answers to the critical questions poised earlier. The main purpose of the study was to look at the life histories of two English language educators and their teaching of reading in a rural primary school in KwaZulu-Natal. The study aimed to investigate the reading life histories of these two educators, focusing on how they were taught to read and came to understand reading, and how this understanding has shaped their teaching of reading in the classroom. This study is based on a qualitative framework within the interpretivist paradigm and a Life History approach was used as it was appropriate for this research.

### 3.2 Research paradigm

The life history research approach is grounded in the interpretivist paradigm. Henning (2004) describes the interpretive framework as a means of deriving meaning from the social interaction which people engage in. Interpretivist researchers do not expect to discover one truth that is generalized to all, but expect and accept different truths in different contexts in which an event (such as teaching) takes place, since these affect experience, and are fluid, changing and unique. The actual interaction between the researcher and the participant is the vital component for generating knowledge in the interpretive framework. The researcher takes on an 'insider' role as he/she makes meaning through observation of social interaction within the research setting, and acknowledges his or her part in shaping what is discovered. The interpretive paradigm helps to understand how people make meaning of the world, and thus accommodates this study. The interpretivist paradigm encompasses research which seeks to "understand the world of human experience" (Cohen & Manion, 1994, p. 36). I adopted this paradigm because I was interested in the participants' experiences of reading. My

intention was to acquire an in-depth understanding of how the participants were taught to read and how they used their knowledge and their training to teach reading in schools. The interpretive paradigm helped me to understand the participants' experiences and how they make sense of their own lives. Thus I was able to see their world through their eyes, in other words, how they perceive reality of reading and teaching children to read, and what meaning they attach to it. The interpretive approach is "concerned with how ordinary people manage their practical affairs in their everyday life, or how they get things done" (Neuman, 1997, p. 68).

### **3.3 Research style**

Henning (2004) states that research cannot be conducted in a vacuum. It must be based on one or other paradigm and framework using either qualitative or quantitative methods. This particular research is based on a qualitative framework within the interpretive paradigm. I was interested in gathering data that is rich and in-depth. Qualitative design allows for an in-depth analysis of data. "The social meanings people attribute to their experiences, circumstances, and situations, as well as the meanings people embed into texts and other objects, are the focus of qualitative research" (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 4). I wanted to gather data from my participants that allowed me to understand their awareness of social reality and their everyday lives, therefore qualitative research allowed me to do that. This research style allowed me to interpret the participants' learning to read and learning to teach life histories and how they used this knowledge to teach reading in their classrooms.

"Qualitative research is intended to approach the world 'out there' and to understand, describe and sometimes explain social phenomena 'from the inside' in a number of different ways" (Flick, 2007, p. 6). This is precisely what I intended to accomplish from this research; that is to have a rich understanding of the reading and teaching life histories of my participants. It allowed me to gather rich social constructed data from my participants. Maree (2007) states that the qualitative researcher collects data from people who are immersed in the setting of everyday life in which the study takes place.

The researcher collects data by interviewing and observing participants in their natural environment. In this study the life history approach allowed me to undertake semi-structured, open-ended interviews and to conduct observations that positioned me to build an understanding of the participants' reading life histories.

### **3.4 Research approach**

The study adopted a life history approach, which used in-depth interview methods that gathered, analyzed and interpreted the stories people told about their lives. Riessman (1993) states that in life history research the researcher works closely with the participants by exploring their stories and recording them. Life history does not only entail information that individuals relate about their entire lives but can focus only on a part of it. The area of focus of my study was on the participants' experiences of learning to read and learning to teach reading, and how their experiences influence their teaching of reading. In the telling of life histories, we are really seeking the insider's viewpoint on the life being lived. "Life history serves as an excellent means for understanding how people see their own experiences, their own lives, and their interactions with others" (Clandinin, 2007, p. 239). "Life history offers a way of exploring the relationship between the culture, the social structure and individual lives" (Goodson & Sikes, 2001, p. 9).

"...life history research emerges as an approach responding to the stories that people habitually tell in everyday life. The life history researcher attempts to structure the process of the telling of stories to yield rich, in-depth details about the specific life experiences, memories and interpretations that the individuals produce" (Dhunpath & Samuel, 2009, p. 4).

Any attempt at describing or evaluating the complex human social condition is prone to distortions, omissions, reductions and elaborations. All we hope to achieve in understanding the human condition is likely to be limited, little more than a glimpse through the window of research. Stories

are one means by which human beings attempt to make sense of that complex human condition: to create some order out of the chaos of competing and contradictory experiences; to bring into dialogue the world of the real and the world of the imagination; to stand Janus-headed, looking backwards and forwards into past life experiences and anticipating the future (Dhunpath & Samuel, 2009, p. 3).

In the above quote the authors are implying that humans are complex species in nature and their behaviours are intricate to understand. Stories help human beings to make sense of their complex human condition. Therefore stories are one of the ways in which people can make meaning of their lives.

“The researcher chooses to identify some specific dimensions of social reality that she wishes to illuminate” (Dhunpath & Samuel, 2009, p. 4). “What emerges in the life history approach thus is a relating of the complexity of the human condition, a representation of the fullness of life against the backdrop of some underlying interpretative or critical framework” (Dhunpath & Samuel, 2009, p. 4). What the authors are arguing here is that life history allows us to make meaning of an individual’s life by concentrating specifically on a specific social reality within that individual’s life. The researcher’s aim is to, “analyse and interpret these “told” memories, experiences and recollections of individuals in a systematic and ordered fashion, allowing other readers to decide on how credible, authentic and trustworthy the stories appear in relation to their (readers’) own life world” (Dhunpath & Samuel, 2009, p. 4). What the authors are implying here is that when a researcher collects his/her data from their participant’s storied life, they need to interpret and analyse this data systematically so that it would make sense to a reader. “The life history researcher’s goal is to be generative of alternative ways of seeing, knowing, understanding and interpreting life experiences. To research is to look again with new eyes” (Dhunpath & Samuel, 2009, p. 5).

The life history researcher chooses to concentrate on a specific realm of what is to be investigated, what realm of one’s life is being researched. This research concentrated on a specific dimension of social reality specifically on the reading life histories of two language educators. In this study the specific realm investigated is the participants’

reading development life history. My intention was to get the participants to re-live their past experiences and look back at their reading development in their own homes, families, communities, primary, secondary schooling and tertiary education and reflect on how they use knowledge gained from these experiences to teach reading in their classrooms.

I was interested to see whether their memories of being taught to read shaped the way in which they taught their learners how to read. I was also interested to study their reading life history to determine how they integrated their memories and early influences on their reading development as children with what they were taught during their teacher training about teaching children to read. Therefore the area of focus of this research was to investigate the participants reading life history and how their reading development impacts in their current teaching environment.

### **3.5 Data collection methods**

To undertake the above research semi-structured open-ended interviews and observations were used to gather data. A life history method allows for open-ended interviews and classroom observations. The use of two or more methods of collecting data is known as triangulation. “Triangulation refers to the attempt to get a ‘true’ fix on the situation by combining different ways of looking at it or different findings” (Silverman, 2000, p. 177). Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000, p. 112), state that, “triangulation techniques in the social sciences attempt to map out, or explain more fully, the richness and complexity of human behaviour by studying it from more than one standpoint.” Triangulation helps in enhancing reliability and validity.

### **3.6. Data collection techniques**

Semi-structured interviews and observations were the two techniques that I utilized to gather data for the research.

### **3.6.1. Semi-structured interviews**

I used semi-structured interviews “see Appendix 4 & 5” with both my research participants. This type of interview schedule allows for an open type of conversational communication. This type of interview allows you to conduct your research face-to-face with your participants. A face-to-face interview conversation between participant and researcher is the most commonly used strategy for collecting life history data. Face-to-face interviews allow the interviewer to probe, clarify, and ask follow-up questions (Corbetta, 2003, p. 270).

This type of interview “would involve a set of preset questions which initiate the discussion, followed by further questions which arise from the discussion. This style of interviewing allows for more flexibility during data collection” (Rule & John, 2011, p. 65). Semi-structured interviews allowed the participants to give me their detailed life experiences in relation to how they learnt to read and how this has impacted on their teaching of reading currently in their classrooms. Further to this I was able to obtain rich in-depth data which is vital in a Life History Methodology. Semi-structured interviews allowed me to use my discretion and to ask questions that linked to the topic and allowed me to prompt the participants to clarify or explain if their response was not clear (Corbetta, 2003). Therefore, it is an appropriate type of data collection for most qualitative designs and can be implemented using different interview formats such as semi-structured and unstructured. “It is a structured conversation where the researcher has in mind particular information that he or she wants from the respondent” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011, p. 412).

Each participant was interviewed three times. I explained the purpose and the intent of the interview process to my participants. They were given assurances that the data that was collected would not reveal any of their identities.

### **3.6.2. Observations**

Observations of the educators at work in their classrooms were paramount to help me gain an insightful understanding of how they taught reading. An observation schedule “see Appendix 3” was used. The observations were semi-structured in that I was able to make informed decisions on what important information was required from these observations.

“Observation methods are more than just looking. It is looking (often systematically) and noting systematically (always) people, events, behaviours, settings, routines and so on. The distinctive feature of observation as a research process is that it offers an investigator the opportunity to gather 'live' data from naturally occurring social situations. In this way, the researcher can look directly at what is taking place *in situ* rather than relying on second-hand accounts” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011, p. 456).

In this research observations played a crucial role in observing the participants’ lessons. It helped in obtaining rich data on how reading was taught. An observation schedule combined with note taking was utilized. The observation schedule is an important instrument that acts as a guide to know what to look for when observing. Observation is beneficial because it assisted me to pick up on aspects of participants’ understanding and practices that I could have missed or were not raised during the interview process. It also allowed me to experience events as they unfolded in the classroom. In this study I observed the participants when they were teaching a reading lesson. I was able to witness the participants’ interaction with the learners as they were teaching reading. Therefore I was able to observe aspects linked to how reading was taught and what types of reading strategies were implemented.

### **3.7. Sample**

Two English language teachers of grade 6 and 7 were selected through the purposive sampling method used in this research. Purposive sampling is commonly found in



qualitative research. Life history is a unique research style that seldom aims to make generalizations and therefore needs participants that are best positioned to yield information in answer to the research questions. Therefore purposive sampling method is best suited for a life history approach. “This method is used in research that is concerned with specific characteristics, attributes or experiences and informants are selected because they meet the criteria” (Goodson & Sikes, 2001, p. 14). Purposive sampling is an approach that is described as seeking “information-rich” sources rather than producing representative samples (Lapan, Quartaroli & Riemer, 2012, p. 253). This research entails collecting in-depth rich data on the two educators’ learning and teaching reading life histories.

### **3.8. Selection of site**

This study took place in a rural primary school in an area that borders Pietermaritzburg in KwaZulu-Natal. The study is part of the second phase of a broader action research project that focuses on reading at a foundational level among both adults (Levels 1 and Levels 2) and children (Grade R–7) in both IsiZulu and English, with the purpose to promote a reading culture among educators, learners and other stakeholders in the learning community. Since IsiZulu is the native language of the learners, the schools medium of instruction is IsiZulu for the first four years of schooling, with English being offered as a first additional language. The school is situated in an area that is surrounded by informal settlements in a rural area. It falls under the administration of the Department of Education and caters for learners from Grade R to Grade 7, also offering Adult Basic Education Training. My research concentrated on the intermediate phase educators at this school.

### **3.9. Ethical issues**

Several ethical considerations were addressed in this research. The questions concerning anonymity and confidentiality are particularly pertinent for this research. Confidentiality relating to the results and findings of the study had to be ensured. All participants' identities had to be protected. Pseudonyms would be utilized to protect their identities. The teachers would be informed that all information from the interviews would be confidential, and names and revealing details would be changed. Informed consent would be obtained from all stakeholders for example: UKZN, The Department of Education, the school principal and the teachers. The purpose and the aim of the study were clearly explained to all participants to ensure their familiarity with the research. The participants were assured that neither them, nor their organization would be harmed by this research. When classroom observations were carried out, permission were sought from the teachers, principal and the school governing body.

### **3.10. Data analysis**

Data analysis involves the understanding or interpreting of information collected as data. "This usually involves fitting the evidence and information into a framework of some kind. This framework may take the form of classifications, categories, models, typologies or concepts" (Goodson & Sikes, 2001, p. 34). Data were obtained from interviewing and observing the participants in their classroom teaching reading. Data were recorded and transcribed into 'summary transcripts'. "Summary transcripts as the name suggests, summarize what is said, using key words and phrases" (Goodson & Sikes, 2001, p. 34).

The manner in which researchers often analyse their data is called coding. Coding is defined as "The analytic process through which data are fractured, conceptualized and integrated to form theory. Codes are, in general, tags or labels for assigning meaning to chunks of data" (Fraenkel, Wallen & Hyun, 2012, p. 436). I used codes to look for

emergent themes and patterns from my data. It guided me to make meaning and understanding of the data.

In this study a thematic content analysis approach was adopted to analyse the data. Thematic content analysis is one of the approaches that have been commonly used in life history to interpret the data. "Thematic content analysis is a form of interpretation that requires the researcher to engage in an interactive process of critical thinking, questioning, and categorizing. It can be defined as a method of analysis for coding or scoring verbal materials to make inferences about characteristics and experiences of persons" (Lapan, Quartaroli & Riemer, 2012, p. 129). Thematic analysis allows for themes and sub-themes to be identified from the text. It further collects and compares material under each theme. In this study I coded the data into themes. The data was presented in the form of a life history narrative.

### **3.11. Limitations**

The following limitations formed part of this study. One Grade 6 and one Grade 7 educator were purposively selected because at the school where the research was conducted there was only one educator who teaches English in Grade 6 and one educator who teaches English in Grade 7. I was interested in these grades specifically because they formed part of the inter-mediate phase which leads on to high school. This being a small sample the results cannot be generalized as they may not be representative of other cases or the general population. A language barrier posed a minor problem, participants at times felt it difficult to express their feelings in English, they had to speak to me slowly trying to find the right word to emphasize their thoughts, but this did not deter them from participating enthusiastically in our discussions. Interview fatigue could have been a problem. Therefore I conducted two interviews and also had a follow-up interview not to over burden the participants.

### **3.12. Validity, reliability and trustworthiness**

Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2011) describe validity as key to effective research. If a piece of research is invalid then it is worthless. “Validity refers to the appropriateness, meaningfulness, correctness, and usefulness of the inferences a researcher makes. Reliability refers to the consistency of scores or answers from one administration of an instrument to another, and from one set of items to another” (Fraenkel, Wallen & Hyun, 2012, p. 147). To increase validity this research used more than one method to collect data which is known as ‘triangulation’. Triangulation helps to strengthen reliability and validity. When I interviewed the participants they would have told me what they thought I wanted to hear so by observing them I could check whether what they said during the interviews was actually what they were doing. Using triangulation in this way would mean that my findings would be more trustworthy than they would have been if I had only used interviews. The data collection instruments were first piloted on a language educator teaching the same grades in a similar setting to ensure effectiveness. This helped in ensuring that the data collection instruments fit the purpose of the research. I had to change some of the questions as they were repetitive. This piloting exercise helped to eliminate duplication, confusion and misunderstanding.

### **3.13. Summary**

This chapter described the research design and methodology that was utilised in the research. A life history approach was adopted to undertake the research which fell within the interpretivist paradigm. Semi-structured interviews and observations were carried out to collect qualitative data. Two language educators were purposively chosen to fit the purpose of the research. The participants were made aware of the ethical considerations during the research.

### 4.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I will present the data that was collected for this study. A life history methodology was utilized in this study. This study looks at the literacy-related life histories of two English language educators teaching reading in a rural primary school in KwaZulu-Natal. This chapter will present data on the interviews and classroom observations of both participants. Pseudonyms had to be used to protect anonymity of the participants. The aim of the study was to answer the following research questions.

- What are these intermediate and senior phase educators' experiences of learning reading?
- How were these teachers trained to teach reading?
- What strategies do these teachers use to teach reading?
- How does participation in the UKZN Reading Project influence the teachers' understanding of teaching reading?

### 4.2. Lucky's history

Lucky is a male teacher who is forty three years old. He chose his own pseudonym. Lucky is a Grade 6 language educator teaching in a rural primary school in KZN. He was born in 1969 in an area called Vulisaka, which is in Vulindlela just outside Pietermaritzburg. In 1987 Lucky and his family had to flee the area due to political violence. They moved to an area outside Pietermaritzburg where he currently resides. When he was growing up, he lived with his father, mother and four other siblings. He said they were seven siblings altogether but one of his brothers and one of his sisters passed away because they were ill.

Lucky could recall when he was just a little boy living in Vulindlela, he and his friends used to swim in the Msunduzi River and play soccer on the road. Lucky was very sad when he had to leave this area because of the close bond he shared with his friends. Lucky grew up under strict conditions at home and they were taught to always respect their elders. Lucky could not come home late but had to be at home before 6 o'clock. He used to be afraid of his father because his father was a strict disciplinarian. If he argued or answered back to his elders Lucky knew he would get a beating from his father.

#### **4.2.1. Educational development prior to entering school**

Lucky said that he was very fortunate because his grandmother used to tell him stories. She also elaborated what they could learn from these tales. His grandmother was instrumental in educating Lucky prior to his going to school. His father only went up to Standard 2 (Grade 4). His mother was fortunate because she was able to go up to Standard 6 (Grade 8) as she got help from a minister of religion. His mother attended a mission school but she had to leave because she got married. Lucky said that his elder brother also read to him and his brother told him that he had to listen attentively because after reading he was going to ask questions.

Lucky felt that his mother was his role model in his life. His mother told him that if she had not married, she would have been able to be a teacher. His mother had the opportunity to complete standard six and could have qualified to become a teacher. He said that his mother encouraged him to learn. She would always speak about her employers' children who were always learning and reading different kinds of books. Lucky said that his mother was a domestic worker and worked for a white family. She had a wonderful employer; who gave his mother books and different kind of things like old clothes, furniture and food to bring home. He can remember that his mother used to read those books to him which he enjoyed tremendously.

#### 4.2.2. Learning to read in primary school

Lucky stated that he started primary school when he was seven years old. There were only two schools in that area and they were far from home - about 5 km away, so he had to walk a long distance to his school. The school was overcrowded.

When asked how he was taught to read in primary school, Lucky explained that during the first years of primary school he learnt the letters representing vowels followed by the consonants in isiZulu. The teacher had cards with the vowels written on them. Each card only had a single vowel written on it, and she read out the vowels to the learners and they had to write the vowels down on slates after looking at the card. The teacher would pronounce the vowel and they repeated it after her. Later the teacher also introduced them to the consonants and the vowels together by writing them out in words for example, (*ikati, igundane, umata, ibhodwe*). The teacher gradually used these words and formed small sentences, which were written on cards and stuck on the board. The teacher would read them aloud and Lucky had to repeat these words after the teacher. This was Lucky's first step in learning how to read by reading out the sentences from the cards with the teacher's support. This was done by pronouncing each letter of the word first, then repeating the entire word and later reading out the complete sentence.

When the teacher wanted to teach reading she would take Lucky and the other learners outside to read because they were in a hall and the classes were not separated, so to avoid disturbing the rest of the learners, they would go to learn under a tree. The teacher introduced them to isiZulu stories which she read from a book that had pictures and sentences. Lucky would look at the picture while the teacher discussed the sentences with the help of the pictures. There was also a chalkboard under the tree. The teacher used to write down the words and sentences from the story book and made them read with her. The teacher taught Lucky literacy skills in his mother tongue. This would have laid a foundation for conceptual development and acquiring literacy skills in other languages. Lucky was gradually introduced to English in Grade 2 but much more emphasis was still on learning to read in isiZulu.

Lucky only started learning sentences in English when he was in Standard 3 (Grade 5). Lucky's early experience in learning how to read occurred when the teachers read a sentence written in English on a chalkboard and the children were asked to repeat after them. Lucky said that they had to look at the written sentence and repeat after the teacher. At home he was assisted by his elder brother and mother. He improved his reading in English by reading old books at home that were appropriate to his level. He would read out loud so that his family members could hear him and assist him. Lucky said that he was fortunate to have English books at home due to his mother's employer's generosity. Lucky explained that he loved to read books about history, for example teachings about the old kings Shaka and Dingiswayo. The radio was also a major influence in Lucky's life. He liked listening to stories over the radio. He listened to both English and isiZulu stories. Lucky admitted his English was still not very good back then. Although Lucky was learning to read in English at home he still found it very difficult to speak the language. IsiZulu was the language spoken at home and he only spoke English when he was reading the books. His mother and brother knew limited English and they tried to assist where they could.

#### **4.2.3. Learning to read in high school**

Lucky stated that he attended three high schools. The first high school was Emzawweni High School in Vulindlela. The second school was Masijabule High School in Swayimane and the third was Mcothoyi High School in the South Coast. He explained that the main reason for him attending three different schools was because of the violence in each area. He explained that political violence had a very disruptive effect on his education.

Lucky felt that when he was in high school there was no one there to guide him or follow him to make sure that he knew what he was doing. Unlike primary school where there was always someone to guide the learners and check on their work, in high school, he had to find ways to find information on his own. Lucky said that high school was based on what he had already learnt and knew. Thus in high school he had to be independent



whilst in primary school he had support. Lucky stated that his primary school reading experiences helped to support him in high school. He stated that in primary school his teachers taught him how to handle a book; how to take care of a book, keep it clean and how to hold a book in the correct manner. He said that he was taught the consonants, pronunciation and phonics. On the other hand, in high school his teachers gave him a story to read independently and that the teacher only gave them an overview of the story so he had to read and understand the text for a deeper meaning on his own.

To enable Lucky and his fellow pupils to read with understanding the teachers asked them to consult their dictionaries when they did not understand a word. The teachers did not want to give them all the answers. Instead they wanted them to make meaning by themselves. Lucky not only used the dictionary to look for the meanings of the words, but also used his dictionary to learn how to pronounce the word correctly. Lucky said that while he was in high school he liked to read newspapers, both in English and isiZulu because he wanted to know what was happening around the world. He was particularly interested in reading about the economy and advertising. Lucky explained that he was specifically interested in reading about developments in medicine and technology. When I asked Lucky what he meant by advertising, he replied that he liked reading articles that discussed research in medicine and technology.

### **4.3. Tertiary education**

Lucky explained that when he was a little boy he dreamt that one day he would be able to change his life. The difficulties and the hardships that Lucky experienced when he was growing up posed a barrier to his education.

He attended Mpumalanga College of Education as part of his tertiary education where he studied for his Diploma in Education. After completing his diploma, he studied further for an Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) certificate from University of South Africa (UNISA). He continued to study and also completed an Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE) through UNISA. Lucky persevered and continued to study and went on

to complete his Honours in Education Degree through UNISA, specializing in Management. Lucky said that he is taking a break from studying because he wants to concentrate on his family. He mentioned that his daughter will be going to study at UKZN next year and he wanted to concentrate on her. Lucky told me that he is married and has four children, but one passed away and now he has only three. They are all living with him at the moment.

Lucky said he went through the following changes since becoming a teacher:

Yes, self respect. As I am working with children, I suppose to make sure that I do not do something that they are going to copy me - sometimes I will do...Ja, I say you must practice what you preach.

Lucky said his aim was to instill positive values into his learners. Lucky was raised in an environment where his father instilled strict morals and values in him. Lucky grew up in times of political violence and he had to embrace the morals and values he was taught regardless of the violence they as a family encountered. His education motivated him to embrace these values so that he could become a better person and continue to pass this trait on to his fellow learners in his classrooms.

Lucky said that while he was studying at college to become a teacher the level of the reading material was difficult to understand and overwhelming. He was not taught only by one person but the media also played a big part, especially the radio, television and newspapers. He said that he used to listen to the English stories over the radio and tried to make meaning of what was said. He stated that he concentrated on the purpose and aim of the story. Lucky explained that this equipped him to listen attentively and at the same time make meaning of what was happening during the lectures. He said that English newspapers assisted him immensely; whenever he read an article of interest he analysed in depth to gain an understanding of the text. At college when he was studying they taught him different reading strategies like scanning, skimming and intensive reading. They also equipped him with the knowledge to understand critical aspects. They promoted intensive global reading (news or articles that pertain to international countries). Lucky was exposed to these strategies as part of his teaching development

workshop which was held over a number of days that helped him to analyse and understand his own academic content.

Lucky said that the way he was taught to read in tertiary institutions propelled him to become a better teacher in the classroom. He explained that he encouraged himself to increase his own knowledge so that he could become a better teacher in the classroom. He further explained that the more he studied the better he equipped his learners with knowledge and that although it was a little knowledge he knew his learners will benefit in some way. Lucky said that in college not much training was given to him to teach children how to read. He could remember that the lecturers informed him that when he was teaching reading he should read the story out to the class and then get the learners to tell him what they had learnt from the story. Lucky had to read the story out a number of times until the learners showed some understanding.

When asked how he developed his reading skills, Lucky said that he adopted many strategies in the classroom to teach reading for meaning. He labels reading for meaning as “intensive reading.” When he teaches intensive reading he tells his learners to use skimming and scanning as ways to relate and make meaning of the text. His learners must be able to identify certain aspects in the text for example to find a figure of speech. Lucky believes that learners “must also know the outcome of the story. Outcome means knowing the general understanding of the story.” After they have read the story, he asked them questions. This helps him to assess whether the learners have understood the “outcome of the story”. At college Lucky said the way they trained him to teach reading was to get the learners to look at the cover of the book. They had to look at the pictures on the cover and also at the title to make their own meaning what they think the book will be all about. His lecturers also taught him about the characters, plot and setting in a book.

To activate the learner’s background knowledge Lucky asks them to utilize their own thoughts about the subject and to interpret what they thought would happen in the text. Lucky said, “They must use their everyday happenings to understand the text from their personal thoughts.” Lucky stated that he takes the learners’ own context into consideration when teaching. He said, “Their background and their context play a big

role.” He further asserted that the learners in the school where he teaches come from very poor backgrounds. Their parents are unemployed, they are sick with diseases and many learners are exposed to family violence and social problems. He described these as some of the barriers to learning. Lucky explained that he tries to overcome these barriers by motivating them and encouraging them to be “focused and strong” towards their schoolwork. They come to school to learn, and view school as an escape from their home problems. It is Lucky’s opinion that if they continue to learn all the problems they have such as hunger, starvation and health problems would be solved. Lucky said that their parents send them to school to solve these problems. Lucky told them that, “Education is the key, and it is your weapon. You are solving your own problem by educating yourselves.”

I asked Lucky what has he learnt from the UKZN reading project. He responded by saying that this project had helped him gain valuable insight and equipped him with new methods to teach reading. The styles and demonstrations taught at the workshops were interactive and he enjoyed the strategies that were used to teach reading. Lucky said that if he could implement all the styles and strategies that were taught at those reading workshops fruitfully to his learners, he believes the problem associated with reading in South Africa will disappear.

#### **4.4. Classroom observation – Lucky**

What follows is the report on an observation of a lesson taught by Lucky. The report entails an account of what transpired in the classroom whilst Lucky was teaching a poetry lesson in English to his Grade 6 learners.

On arrival to the class the learners were all over the place and noisy. When they noticed me enter the class they all scrambled to their places and settled down. Lucky was walking around the class and he instructed them to settle down and behave. He introduced me to the class. They greeted me and they all took their seats. I greeted them and I explained the purpose of my visit. The classroom environment was generally

clean and tidy. The desks were arranged in groups of sixes. There were very few charts on the walls and mostly highlighted government information. The learners were dressed in full school uniform but their appearance showed the abject poverty they were exposed to because many wore torn and dirty uniforms. There were no books or reading material visible in the classroom.

Lucky informed the class that they were not reading their books on that day, but that they would be reading a poem and would continue with the reading of the book the next day. Lucky asked a learner what the title of the poem was. A learner answered and said, "The title of the poem, *You can't depend on anything.*" Lucky asked what the name of the author was. A learner said, "Peejy Dunston." Lucky repeated the author's name, which was Peggy, in the same incorrect manner as the learner. Lucky asked the class if anyone could explain what the author was saying before they commenced with reading of the poem. The class was silent. Lucky then directed this question to a girl. She said, "The boy kicks the empty rubbish tin." Lucky asked the first group to read the poem. They read the poem, "*You can't depend on anything. When I was a little boy I used to race about and kick empty rubbish tins that people have left out. I am older now and know better. The last tin that I kicked was full and I nearly broke my toe. We learn things as we grow. The tin that I just kicked was full and nearly broke my toe.*" Lucky told the next group to read the poem out the second time but this time they had to start from, ' *I am older now.*' Lucky reminded the class that he would be asking them questions at the end of the lesson as they finished with the reading. The class was divided into seven groups, each group had six learners. The groups were made up of both boys and girls. Each group had to read the poem aloud and they had to be prepared to answer questions.

Lucky then instructed the entire class to read the poem loud. After they had read the poem, Lucky nominated one person from a group to read the poem out loud. Lucky told the class that they had to answer the questions based on the poem. The class responded to Lucky's questioning as follows:

*Lucky: Can anyone identify any figures of speech in the poem?*

*Class: (Silent)*

*Lucky: I will read the poem out to you line by line. (Lucky read the poem.)*

*Lucky: Can anyone now identify a figure of speech.*

*Learner: Direct speech.*

*Lucky: No it is not direct speech. Look at this sentence, "We learn things as we grow." Is this sentence a metaphor or a simile?*

*Class: (Silent).*

*Lucky: Alright, yes it is a simile. Next question, what did the boy learn as he grew older?*

*Learner: He learnt that he must not kick rubbish tins.*

*Lucky: What is the message of the poem?*

*Learner: You cannot depend on anything.*

*Lucky: The message is, you can't depend on anything and what else.*

*Learner: To kick the empty rubbish tins.*

*Lucky: What is going to happen if you kick that? Why is it wrong, by doing that?*

*Learner: Because you are going to broke your toe.*

*Lucky: Yes, because you can break your toe. What has the boy learn from this?*

*Learner: He learnt not to kick rubbish tins that are full.*

From the above dialogue Lucky tried to initiate a discussion about the poem, he elaborated on the message and figurative language of the poem. Through this strategy he attempted to tap into the learners understanding of how they interpret the poem. He invited the learners to share their own personal understanding of the message of the poem.

Lucky asked the class to summarize the poem. He wanted them to tell him in their own words what they have learnt from the poem. The learners responded as follows:

*Learner: Do not do something that will hurt you.*

*Lucky: In everything that you do, you must know what the consequence in the end will be. You are still young and there are many things that you will do thinking it is good. There are learners in this classroom, who do bad things which are good for them but are bad for other learners.*

*Learner: Like making noise.*

*Lucky: Yes like making noise.*

*Learner: Fighting.*

*Lucky: Fighting and stealing.*

*Learner: Eating*

*Lucky: Yes eating in the class.*

*Learner: Breaking the rules.*

*Lucky: Breaking the rules in class yes. All these things that you have mentioned are bad. Like when learners steal after that they become what?*

*Learner: Thieves.*

*Lucky: Absolutely they will become thieves and what is the result of becoming a thief? What is going to happen after that?*

*Learner: He will hijack cars.*

*Lucky: He will hijack cars and after hijacking cars what will be the result of that.*

*Learner: The police will catch him and he will belong to the jail.*

*Lucky: He will be arrested. The boy in the poem that is kicking the bins he is young and he is just playing and at the same time what is happening to his shoes.*

*Learner: His shoe will have a hole.*

*Lucky: Yes a hole, who is going to tell me what is going to happen to his shoes?*

*Learner: They will be cut.*

*Lucky: The boy's shoe will not last.*

Lucky told the class that they must write a summary on the poem on what they have discussed. Lucky ended the lesson by recapping the essence of the poem by asking a

learner to summarize what the poem is about. A learner put her hand up and said, “The poem is about a boy who kicked empty dust bins that people left behind. One day he kicked the rubbish tin that was full and he nearly broke his toe.” Lucky thanked her and the class clapped hands for her. The learners were told to continue reading the poem silently till the end of the lesson and that they would be given questions to answer in their books the next day.

#### **4.5. Pinky’s history**

Pinky is a female teacher who is forty four years old. She chose her own pseudonym name “Pinky”. Pinky is a Grade 7 English language educator teaching in a rural primary school in KwaZulu-Natal. Pinky is currently married and has five children of her own. She was born and brought up in an area outside Pietermaritzburg called Edendale. She lived with her mother, grandmother, younger sister, aunt and her two children. Her mother was unmarried and had a limited education. Pinky came from a difficult social background. Her mother was the main breadwinner and had to do sewing to earn an income. They also relied on their grandmother’s pension money. Pinky’s father left them when she was a baby. Her father lived in Ixopo. Pinky’s father only visited them about 5 times a year. As Pinky grew older she used to visit her father during the holidays. Pinky’s relationship with her father gradually developed to the extent that he started to take care of her. She felt that her father was afraid to take responsibility over her whilst she was young. As the years progressed Pinky and her father grew closer. Today they have a very special bond.

When Pinky was in Standard 5 (Grade 7) she became very ill. She went to live with her neighbour. Pinky had a very good relationship with her neighbour. They treated her as if she was one of their children. She stayed with her neighbour for most of her teenage years. Her home was only a few meters away from the neighbour’s house. Although her mum was at home, she had to stay with the neighbour because they suspected something was wrong in her house. I asked Pinky if it was something like “*Black magic*” that made her sick. She said no her grandmother did not believe it was evil spirits that



were responsible for her health problems. Her grandmother believed in her bible and prayers. Pinky said that she got sick because there was not enough food for her to eat. She used to be hungry because of the poverty that she was exposed to. Her grandmother prayed for her whenever she got sick. However, she explained that every time she stayed at home, she got very sick.

#### **4.5.1. Educational development prior to entering school**

Pinky's mum was very strict with her. At home her mum told her whatever games she played it must be school-based. She used to play a game called "teacher and learners" which was a school game. The older children, who attended school, knew this game well. They were the teachers and she and her friends had to be the learners. They played this game and had to listen to the child who was pretending to be the teacher.

Whilst she was playing this game she heard a sound of a bell, the only bell she knew was the church bell. The child-teacher told them that there was a bell in school and when they heard the bell ringing they must go outside for break. Pinky said, "I asked her what I must do during break, she said I can play, eat and do all other games and then when the bell rings I must come back to class. Before I went to primary school I already knew those basic ideas. All this happened when I was living in Edendale and played with the neighbours' children."

Pinky's mum was instrumental in her educational development prior to her attending school. She said that her mum was the first one who taught her how to hold a pen and write all the vowels. She learnt to write the vowels from her mum before going to school. Every afternoon her mum would sit down and read a story to them. While she read they would listen to the story. This habit carried on until one day she said, "I am tired of reading the story to you and you are just listening without asking any questions." Her mother told them that from then on whenever she read a story she would be asking them questions. Sometimes when she read to them she and her little sister would fall asleep. Smiling, she recalled how her mother would just raise her eyebrows and shout

at them, “You are fast asleep and not listening to the story!” Then she would tell them that she was going to ask them questions after reading the story so they had to listen attentively. The stories her mother read to them were *Goldilocks*, *The Three Bears*, *Cinderella*, *The Birth of Christ* and scary stories about cannibals.

Her little sister was never interested in listening, she just wanted to look at the pictures and say what she thought the story was all about. Pinky used to tell her, “No, no, no, mum is going to read the story for us.” Her sister said, “No, no, I know the story,” because she had already looked at the pictures but Pinky wanted to listen because she said that she was very good in listening.

Her grandmother also liked reading to them. Every night before they had supper they prayed. Her grandmother used to read the Zulu Bible to them. As a little girl she remembers just thinking, “No, my grandmother she cannot read, but she was always reading the Bible for us and they said, oh, that is the only book she can read – she can’t read other books, but she can take the hymn book and read the words the way they are written and say, this is how you say these things.” Pinky’s grandmother helped her to understand the words in the hymn book. She was her role-model and helped in educating her. She instilled values of discipline and respect and said one important point to her before she could go to school. She said, “When you are at school, you must know that you do not go to bed without reading. If it happens that you do it, you must know that you are just like someone who has not washed the body after a long day’s work, so the mind got nothing.” I always remember my grandmother’s words, “Oh, your mind is dirty-you are sleeping without reading, ooh, your mind is just dirty.” So Pinky said, “Oh, to clean my mind I have to read.” Thus she always tells her learners, that they should not go to bed without reading. After they have eaten and finished their chores they must take a book and read for pleasure.

#### 4.5.2. Learning to read in primary school

The first thing Pinky can remember about Primary School is that she did not cry on her first day. She saw other children crying, but she did not because school was familiar to her as it was something that she played before as a game. Pinky started primary school in 1974 and attended Nichols Primary School in Edendale. The principal was a lady who was very disciplined. She expected everyone to be disciplined in the premises and also outside the premises. She instilled values that made them become “prim and proper ladies.”

Pinky said that she had good teachers in primary school. The school gave her books. The first thing she can remember about reading was that she did picture reading and then the teacher pasted the words on the board. The teacher stuck a picture on the wall and called her to the front of the class and asked her what she could see in the picture. The teacher had words relating to the picture and she had to choose the correct word that best described the picture. She had to learn to recognise the word on the board and had to pronounce the word. Later she had to write the word on the board. She had to use this word to make up a sentence. Pinky explained that platooning is where there are far too many learners in a class and they have to separate the class into two groups. One group started school early in the morning followed by the other group who started at 11 o' clock. They did reading three times a week. Sometimes they had to do it in front of the assembly where they would do actions like say they are washing their hands and then they had to ask questions, “What am I doing?” Pinky said they had to read from their books and they had to do the action so that the entire school could see what they were doing. The teacher emphasized reading by allowing the whole class to participate in the assembly and to read and do the action. The teacher emphasized decoding only and not the meaning in context.

Pinky learnt to read in isiZulu in Grade 1. She describes the books they used in school as follows:

*It was a red book. It had a picture of an apple at the beginning with a letter 'a' and there was an emblem. During Grade 2 we were gradually*

*introduced to English. We were using these books called English Through Activity; Going for a Walk (Arnold & Varty, 1973) – walking under a tree we are under a tree, where are we now, look at that boy, what is he doing? He is jumping – all those activities. The teacher made us read and act out what was written in the book. We only used English Through Activity books. Sometimes we had to read in groups. Each group was given a name of a fruit and the teacher would say Oranges take out your books and read the work done in Grade 2. I used the same book English Through Activity right up to Standard 5 (Grade 7).*

Pinky's reading development as a child was very slow because she experienced difficulties because of the environment she was living in and because she came from a poor family. She was not exposed to a variety of print material. Sometimes the only book that she had was the *English Through Activity* book from school. Pinky's mother could not afford to buy newspapers as newspapers were only bought by those people who had money. However, her mother tried her best to help her with her reading homework by helping her out when she could not pronounce a word.

When asked what motivated her to read and what books she enjoyed reading in primary school, Pinky said that the aspect that motivated her to read was something her teacher told her, that the information is always hidden in books. Her teacher said, "If you want to know what is happening around you, you must read." Pinky explained that there are many things that you can find from books and it made her realize the importance of reading. During her primary school years Pinky recalls reading Shakespeare. Pinky was still living with her neighbour, who had two older children who were in high school. Pinky liked the way the neighbours' children spoke. They read Shakespeare "*Julius Caesar*". So, because she wanted to speak like them, she asked them to lend her that book. However Pinky found it difficult to understand, so she asked them to help her. Pinky enjoyed the English language and she was very lucky because when she was in Grade 12 she studied the same book.

#### **4.5.3. Learning to read in high school**

Pinky attended Sukuma High School in Imbali. She did well in Grade 7 and she got a distinction. Her father could afford to send her to Sukuma High School. She stayed in the boarding facility. Pinky completed her Grade 8 there. The standard of education was high. Pinky was taught to speak good English by white teachers. She made good progress in her reading and writing in English. Pinky was also exposed to ballroom dancing which she took on as part of her extra-curricular activities. During this time there was a change in her attitude. She felt that, “Oh, my parents now can afford to take me to the boarding school and I just became better than the other children in the area.” However her parents took her out of the school because they felt that she was developing a superiority complex and looking down at her own people. Pinky was taken out of Sukuma and was sent to Smeru High School in Edendale. She completed her Grade 12 at this school.

Pinky felt that her primary school helped her a lot because when she entered high school she had already acquired adequate reading skills. If she had to put it in percentage terms her reading development in primary school was 80% and 20% in high school. High School was more difficult and challenging because she was exposed to new people and she had to adapt to a new environment. In high school her teachers just gave the learners work, for example a comprehension passage. She had to go home and read it and look for the meanings of words in the dictionary. Pinky had no dictionary and she had to ask her mother to help her. The next day the teacher discussed the passage and the learners were made aware of the text and difficult words. It is unclear what aspects were discussed. Pinky enjoyed reading science books, Shakespeare and poetry books during her high school years. She liked being exposed to different types of genres.

#### **4.6. Tertiary education**

When Pinky passed Matric (Grade 12) she wanted to become a nurse. When she started her training for nursing she realized it was not for her, so she quit nursing in her second year and decided to become a teacher. I asked her what made her choose teaching. She said that in her community the general perception was that if they had done well in school there were only two careers that girls could choose. Normally the girls chose to become a nurse or teacher and the boys must choose to become policeman or a teacher. This is the reason why she became a teacher.

In 1990 Pinky enrolled to study a teacher's diploma part-time as a distance student at the Vista University in Pretoria. She studied from home and during this time she was a housewife. She was married but she had no children. I asked Pinky how she was taught to read and understand academic content. She said that she had to find out on her own because there was no lecturer. Her husband assisted her to make meaning of academic content. He was also studying to become a teacher but later changed his mind and he became a male nurse.

I asked Pinky how she was trained to teach reading at tertiary level. Pinky said that her lecturers usually came once a year for a block learning session. They were only available for a day or two. During this time they would give Pinky a lot of material to read. Pinky had to learn by herself how to teach reading in the classroom. Pinky said she adopted different strategies in her class when teaching reading. She used pictures, and the alphabetic and phonic approach. The lecturers told her that the way she could teach reading in class, was by using resources that were available because at some schools there are no books for reading. She said, "They advised her to give the learners the newspaper and tell them to read. They would learn to read different articles and they should be able to identify the reading, for example reading for pleasure. You could also ask them to read one specific story and give them questions to check if they understood what they had read." Pinky was told that newspapers are easily accessible and that they are a rich descriptive resource that is beneficial and informative to learners' lives. Pinky could use different reading strategies to get the learners interested

in reading. Pinky could introduce her learners to new words which would enrich their vocabulary. She could teach them how to construct sentences and to expose them to paragraph writing by reading articles in the newspaper.

I asked Pinky how she thought the way in which she learnt to read influenced the way in which she taught reading in her classroom today. Her response was that her grandmother's words always remind her that reading is a good thing for the mind. She kept telling her learners this. Pinky says she can see a more positive attitude in her learners regarding reading. There are no libraries in the area where she teaches. The only place children see books is in school. They come and ask her for books. Pinky lends her own books out to the learners and has adopted a strategy where she lends books out to boys only for a week and then to the girls the next week. She also writes questions down so that after they read the books they have to answer questions based on the book to show their understanding.

When asked about some of the strategies that she adopted in the classroom to teach reading for meaning. Pinky said that she uses comprehension passages (texts with comprehension questions attached) to help learners read for meaning. Further to this she said vocabulary is important to know and construction of sentences is also important. She further explained:

*The comprehension helps when they read for meaning because-and they have to know the vocabulary. Vocabulary is very important to know and then the construction of sentences. How they constructed the tenses. Which tense is this comprehension in, so when I am asking questions then they will be able to answer the questions according to the tense. For example I will say, how it happened-a learner cannot say, it happened; he says it in the present tense. He has to say it in past tense. Yes, before they starts reading, I just ask them what they know-I give them the topic or even if they are just looking, whether it is a book or a newspaper, there's a picture, what do they know, what do they think the story is about, what do they know about the particular topic and then they just give you what they know about it. Ja, ok, I just-because sometimes there are some words that*

*they cannot find from the dictionary, so to make them understand easier, I just ask something else and then they come up with that something and then I just relate it to this word and I will say, this is how it works, this is ...ja Although...ja I use it, like what they... Ja they..you know sometimes families, you know what-there are some children don't know it all but they think that they know without knowing them from the parent just by the community they are living in, they know those things and then, whenever I am starting a lesson I make sure that they know something about it-even in the other learning areas there must be something that they know and how and where did they get it from but prior knowledge is very important.*

As can be seen above Pinky adopts strategies that help to activate the learner's prior knowledge. She asks them questions to stimulate their memory in order to make meaning of the text. She does this using the learner's context and experiences to assist in the meaning process of the text.

Pinky teaches in a poverty stricken rural area on the outskirts of Pietermaritzburg. Pinky described the area as follows:

*The area from which these learners come it effects the learners because, you know, some of them, they do have their parents at home but their parents are...they are just using the alcohol. Yes they abuse them. So they just see school as a place of safety. But other than that, others know that no, at school we are there to learn and I emphasize that everyday. I make it sink in their minds that here at school what they come for is for their future and the future belongs to them alone, not to their parents-no matter what happens at home or which family you are coming from, whether it's rich or poor or even the community, you won't have an excuse in life that I did not succeed because the parent was drinking-that's not an excuse.*

I asked Pinky what had she learnt from the UKZN reading project. She said that she learnt how to use newspapers as a resource in the classroom and how to use the



different methods to teach reading for meaning and understanding. She uses the handout which she gives to her learners; they read it and they try to make meaning of the text. She uses the jigsaw strategy very often especially with the weaker learners. She cuts up the sentences and mixes them up and she tells her learners to put the sentences in the correct order. This strategy is interactive and they work in mixed ability groups. When it comes to writing, it makes it easier for them because they know how to read the sentences. They then have to write these sentences out. She tells them they need to be careful when they are writing and to watch out for punctuation marks and spelling.

Pinky stated that:

*Every Friday they do a spelling test. I take the words from the reading they have done for the week. I not only take words from my English classes but I also take words from the other learning areas as well. I do this because I want the learners to understand that spelling is important not only in English but also they need to know their words in the other learning areas as well.*

Pinky reiterated the importance of the UKZN reading workshops. She said that these workshops taught her so much about reading and that the learners are now equipped to handle reading comfortably. She explained that the learners are now eager to read, unlike before where they used to just sit and listen to the story and showed no enthusiasm. Now when she reads to the class and asks them who wants to read they all put their hands up and say they want to read. Pinky admits that the UKZN Reading Project had also propelled her to study further; she has enrolled at UNISA for the Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE) programme in Life Orientation.

#### 4.7. Classroom observation – Pinky

What follows is the report on the classroom observation of Pinky's lesson. The report entails an account of what transpired in the classroom whilst Pinky was teaching a reading lesson in English to her Grade 7 learners.

On my arrival to the class the learners were all standing up. There was some movement of learners from one class to another before the commencement of the lesson. Whilst Pinky was settling them in I made notes of the classroom environment. The classroom was clean and well kept although it contained very old desks and chairs. There were very few charts in the back of the class with pictures of animals. The classroom was well lit and there was a chalkboard in the front of the class. All the children were dressed in school uniform although some of their uniforms were torn and faded. The desks were arranged in a semi circle around the class with rows in the middle. There were a few books lying on a table next to the teacher's table that resembled a small library.

Pinky began by introducing what they would be doing in the lesson. She spoke in English for most of the lesson but I did detect isiZulu being used occasionally when she felt she needed to explain certain aspects. Pinky asked the class to take out their story book called *The Sandalwood Secrets*, by Beulah Wood. There were enough books because each learner had their own copy. The following vignette demonstrates how Pinky engaged her learners in pre-reading questions:

*Pinky: Look at the cover page. What is the title of the book?*

*Learner: The Sandalwood Secrets.*

*Pinky: Look at the picture and tell me what you see.*

*Learner: I can see two boys in the forest and they look like they are lost.*

*Learner: I can see plants and trees.*

*Pinky: What do you think this book is all about?*

*Learner: I think it is something that these two boys want to know about the sandalwood.*

*Pinky: The title of the book is, Sandalwood Secrets. What is a secret? Yes.*

*Learner: speaks in isiZulu.*

*Pinky: In English. Ok...*

*Learner: It is something that is not known by other people.*

*Pinky: Do you have any secrets?*

*Learner: Yes*

*Pinky: Can you please tell me your secret.*

*Learner: No, it's a secret.*

*Pinky: Why don't you want me to know your secret?*

*Learner: Because it is secret it must not be known.*

*Pinky: It must not be known by other people, ok. I like secrets...you don't want to tell me about your secret. Where do you think the story is taking place-where about, you think the story is taking place?*

*Learner: In Pakistan.*

*Pinky: Laughs. In Pakistan! Just by looking at the picture. Where do you think it is taking place? Yes.*

*Learner: Into the forest.*

As seen from the above, Pinky introduced the novel by asking the class pre-reading questions to activate the learners' prior knowledge. Pinky used this strategy to get the learners' minds stimulated and to allow them to make inferences from the story. Learners responded positively. The last question in the above vignette where Pinky asked the class, "Where this story takes place?" and a learner said, "Pakistan", Pinky did not elaborate or question the learner further on his answer.

She told the class that they must look at the picture in the front cover of the book. She asked the class again and a learner said in the forest. Pinky asked the class what they knew about sandalwood. A learner said it is used to make something. Pinky said it is trees which are used to make something like what. One learner said, "Paper". Pinky said, "Let's read the story to find out if it is paper."

Pinky told the class to open their book to Chapter 1. She asked the class if they could describe the picture on the first page. A learner said he saw four people. Pinky asked who they thought the four people were. Learners responded and said it was a family. Pinky said that was correct and she instructed a learner to read. She stopped him after a while and instructed another boy to read. From my observation both these learners read quite well, they were able to decode well. Pinky stopped the reading and she asked the class if there were any words which they did not understand. The class replied in the affirmative so Pinky asked them to take out their dictionaries but only some learners had dictionaries. Pinky asked them to tell her the first word that they did not understand. A learner stood up and said, "Scoundrel." Pinky asked the class if anyone knew the meaning. A learner said he thinks it is something that you do wrong. Another learner said that she thought a scoundrel was a thief. Pinky told the class that a scoundrel was someone who was not honest. The learners did not look for the correct meaning in their dictionaries. Pinky asked the class for another word that they did not understand and they responded as follows:

*Learner: Rupees*

*Pinky: Spell the word out to me.*

*Learner: (Spells the word.)*

*Pinky: Check meaning of word in your dictionaries.*

*Learner: It is the currency which is used in India.*

*Pinky: Currency means money. What is the currency of South Africa?*

*Learner: Rands.*

From the above vignette Pinky helped learners to make meaning of the words that they did not understand by prompting them and activating their memory. She also encouraged the use of dictionaries. Pinky concentrated her efforts on word meaning but failed to relate how the word can be used in the context of a sentence.

The learners then had turns to read. Pinky corrected incorrect pronunciation, for example the name of characters in the book. She stopped them after a few minutes and asked the class questions based on the story. She asked questions about what was going on in the story. Learners responded and said they were talking about Sandalwood. A learner said Appen (character in book) would cut down the trees. She made the learners aware that Appen starts with a capital A which means a proper noun a name of a person. She asked the class what they knew about cutting down trees as far as conservation of nature is concerned. She asked what the class thought about the characters in the book cutting down trees. The class responded and said, "No it is bad." Pinky asked, "Why, why?" A learner said it is because they would not get fresh air. Pinky said, "Yes, no air!" Another learner said some of the animals need the trees because they eat leaves. Pinky asked the class what type of animals eat trees and grass. One learner said, "Giraffes." Pinky asked again what these animals are called that eat green shrubs. One learner responded and said, "Omnivores" Pinky responded and said well but they eat meat and grass. Another learner responded and said, "Herbivores." Pinky said, "Well done, they are called herbivores."

Pinky elaborated and said if the trees are cut down some of the animal species on the trees are endangered. She asked the class if it is good to poach. Is it something that they have just heard on the radio or TV? A learner responded and said, "No it is not good because if we cut all the trees there will be a shortage of oxygen." Pinky said a shortage of oxygen and what else. A learner said there will also be soil erosion. Pinky said soil erosion what else? The learner said global warming is coming. Pinky said very good, because we are afraid of 'this man' (Pinky refers to global warming as a person man or woman). She said I don't know whether it is a man or woman but global warming is going to affect us. Pinky said this man Appen was stealing because once you start poaching, the animals are endangered. A learner shouted out, "Rhinos." Pinky

said, “Yes, good rhinos are being poached.” She continued and said that man was cutting down the trees. Some of us just don’t know the use of trees. We only know oxygen that we are going to have little oxygen on earth. Pinky said it is not only oxygen there are many uses of trees that they are still going to find out.

As seen from above Pinky integrated the text to Natural Science learning area. She highlighted concepts such as “omnivores, oxygen, global warming, soil erosion and herbivores”. She also highlighted language concepts such as proper nouns and fact and opinions.

Pinky then instructed another learner to read. Pinky interrupted and told her that she was not observing the punctuation marks when she read. The learner read about Renu and Sanjay (characters in the novel) that are in a crowded bus. Pinky asked the class where they thought the story was taking place. She reminded the class what someone said earlier, that the story is taking place in Pakistan. The following are some of the responses from the learners:

*Learner: India*

Pinky did not clarify with the learner how he knew the story was taking place in India.

*Pinky: In India-it’s happening in India. Where is India? Do you know India?*

*Which continent?*

*Learner: Asia*

*Pinky: In Asia. The continent right. It is taking place in India. Now, because the children do not know the use of the trees, the sandalwood, so they were asking, why is it so important, and then what did their mother say-what is it used for? There are so many things that - Yes?*

*Learner: Soap.*

*Pinky: Soap is made from the trees. Yes?*

*Learner: Perfume.*

*Pinky: Perfume.*

*Learner: Paper.*

Pinky asked the class what other people do with the wood chopped from the tree. Their responses were as follows:

*Learner 1: They carve the wood.*

*Learner 2: They carve images.*

*Pinky: Yes, they carve images. Do you still remember when they are talking about the ice bags.*

*Class: Yes.*

*Pinky: How they carve the ice.*

*Class: Yes.*

*Pinky: That's the same way that they are using it now, to carve. What does it mean?*

*Learner: It's to change something's shape into another shape.*

*Pinky: To change the shape. You carve the wood to make bowls, to make beds, whatever you can think of-furniture, all those are carved.*

Pinky asked the class the following and they responded:

*Pinky: What do you think Appen does with the trees he cut?*

*Learner: He is stealing these trees and he is selling them.*

*Pinky: Is it legal to sell these trees?*

*Learner: No.*

*Pinky: Appen is selling these trees illegally. Do you know what I mean by this?*

*Class silent.*

*Pinky: It is like when you sell sweets in school which is illegal. It is against the law.*

Pinky told the class that she would read then and that she was only going to read two paragraphs. Pinky read and the class watched how she read. When Pinky read she read slowly but very fluently. She was careful with her pronunciation. She read loudly and clearly and learners were able to follow her. Pinky is seen in the class as the More Knowledgeable Other (MKO) (Vygotsky, 1978), so when she reads the learners would watch how she read so that they too can emulate her. In Vygotsky's terms, Pinky is seen as the (MKO), she would be able to demonstrate to the class the proper way to read. She would lead her learners to become good readers by scaffolding them in their reading abilities.

Pinky told the class that they had arrived at school. She asked the class who arrived at school. Learner said, "Roy and Sanjay." Pinky told the class that every time they answer a question that they must answer it in full sentences because it is going to help them when they are writing comprehension. Pinky asked the class what was happening in school. Learner said Roy was thinking of the sandalwood trees. Pinky said that they are thinking while the teacher is teaching about the protected trees. When can we say the trees are protected? Learner said, "When no one can take them – when no one can cut them down and smuggle them." Pinky said that the right word is not protected but endangered. Pinky asked class what they understood by the word 'endangered' they responded as follows:

*Learner: They are not safe.*

*Pinky: Endangered, yes.*

*Learner: They are nearly finished.*

*Pinky: They are becoming extinct.*

Pinky told the class that Sanjay and Roy (characters in story) wore their cricket gear. She asked the class what they understood by the word 'gear'. The following was their responses:

*Learner: I think gear is a plan.*

*Pinky: A plan.*



*Class silent no response.*

*Pinky: It is like someone playing soccer you can't play soccer with your school uniform.*

*Learner: No.*

*Pinky: You cannot wear your formal shoes and tie to play soccer. They had to wear their sport gear.*

As seen from the above Pinky activates the learners' prior knowledge by probing them for answers. Pinky uses the same strategy again by using their contextualized background to activate their prior knowledge. Learners feel comfortable with this strategy and they are able to make meaning of the words. Pinky still failed to relate the words to the context of the sentence and how it is used in the essence of the sentence and the entire text. Pinky told the class that the intention of the boys was to roll the ball close to the fence so that they could run into the forest and look at the sandalwood trees. No one would suspect that they were looking for the sandalwood trees. Pinky asked the class who were the people that they did not want to see what they were doing, the class responded as follows:

*Learner: They don't want to be seen by the villagers.*

*Pinky: The villagers. Who are the villagers? Yes?*

*Learner: It's the community.*

*Pinky: The community, very good because the people are living in this village. Here you are a student, you are a learner here at school, right?*

*Class: Yes.*

*Pinky: When you are out, you are a...?*

*Learner: Community.*

*Pinky: You are not a community, community is a collective noun. One person cannot make a community. It has to be many people and then they call themselves a community, right.*

As seen from the above, Pinky's explanations helped the class in understanding the context of the story. She integrated collective nouns into her explanation and used an example from their contextualized background to help them with understanding.

Pinky told the class that they were going to read the last chapter. They were told to read in pairs. She corrected one of the girls when she was reading. Pinky instructed two boys to read. Pinky showed them the correct way of holding a book. The boys continued to read. Pinky interrupted them to point out that they were skipping words when they were reading. She read the sentence out and the boys repeated after her. The boys continued to read. Pinky interrupted them and made them aware of the function of the comma; a comma is there for you to pause a little bit. The boys continued to read, *"The boys walked past the forest trees and saw more gum trees and.....like proud men. Look, someone was dragging the plough."* Pinky asked the class what the word 'plough' means. A learner responded and said, "To make the soil ready to plant." Pinky said to make the soil ready for the seed. Pinky asked the class what time of the year is it best to plant the seeds. One learner said summer. Pinky said she thought summer would be too late. Another learner said spring. Pinky said yes in spring, the people started to plough their fields in spring.

Learners continued to read, *"Look, someone has driven past the plant field with an ox...the wheel must have come off. They used a cart."* Pinky asked the class if they knew what a cart is. They said no. Pinky said it is a wagon which is pulled by oxen. She continued and said some carts are pulled by the rickshaw men in Durban. This we call the carriage - it's a cart. Some of the carts are pulled by oxen, some are pulled by the horses and some are pulled by the people. Pinky stopped the reading. She told the class that she would be writing questions on the board and that they should work in pairs and answer the questions. She said they should write the answers down. She told the class she would be giving them a few minutes and then they had to discuss the answers with their partners. However the lesson ended before they could begin this activity.

The following questions, based on what the learners had read, were written on the board.

1. What marks did they see that made them suspicious?
2. Who was this man that was the outlaw?
3. How did the police catch Appen?
4. What did Sanjay and Roy pretend to play?
5. What are Rupees?

**5.1. Introduction**

This chapter presents the analysis of the research findings discussed in Chapter 4. The analysis is organized and analyzed in relation to the key research questions, namely:

- What are these Intermediate and Senior Phase educators' experiences of learning reading?
- How were these teachers trained to teach reading?
- What strategies do these teachers use to teach reading?
- How does participation in the UKZN Reading Project influence the teachers' understanding of teaching reading?

**5.2 What are these Intermediate and Senior phase educators' experiences of learning reading?****Lucky:**

Lucky, the first participant in this research, could recall his learning to read experiences when he was a little boy. Lucky's interaction with books started at an early age prior to him attending school. As noted under point number 4.2.1 of chapter four, he remembers his grandmother telling him stories. His grandmother was the first person who introduced Lucky to books. He used to listen to his grandmother tell these stories and she used to make him understand the story by describing the story in detail, so that he could learn from these stories. Rose (2005) describes this reading strategy as "Shared Reading"; in this strategy the teacher reads a book repeatedly over a period of time. The teacher engages the children in the story until they understand it and they learn it so that they can recite almost every word in the story or part of it. "This strategy promotes learners engagement in the pleasure of reading" (Rose, 2005, p. 149).

Lucky's grandmother read to him when he was little; she was therefore emulating what Rose is saying above. His grandmother would read and she would make an effort to make him understand what she was reading. Lucky's grandmother was therefore engaging him in the pleasure of reading.

His elder brother also read to him and his brother used to warn him that he must listen attentively because after he had read the story he would ask Lucky questions. From this analysis we can see that Lucky was introduced to the world of books and reading by his family members at an early age in life and they also introduced him to a very particular attitude to stories and books. This was important in Lucky's literacy development, and epitomized a perception that is common, perhaps especially among homes where literacy practices are limited, that these stories all have a moral – or some important message to learn. His grandmother and brother expected him to learn from the stories – so reading was not just for fun and pleasure. Lucky was expected to learn during the reading experience and demonstrate his learning after it. Lucky's mother who was educated up to Grade 6 was also instrumental in developing Lucky. She used to bring books home for him so that they could read to him. Lucky's grandmother, brother and mother can be seen as the “more knowledgeable other” here. Vygotskian theory on learning states that children will not learn naturally on their own but will learn with the aid of someone more knowledgeable who can guide and assist in their learning (Krauss,1996).

*The More Knowledgeable Other (MKO)* can relate to someone who has a better understanding or a higher development level than the child and are able to understand the learner's capabilities and offer their guidance and assistance in aiding the child to learn. *The more knowledgeable other* can be a teacher, peer or an adult. The teacher or the adult aids in scaffolding the child as they navigate their way through the learning process. In essence the *MKO* “arranges the environment and creates a scaffold so that the learner is able to attain a higher or more abstract perspective on the learning task” (Krauss, 1996, p. 61). Vygotsky's *Social Constructivism Theory* (Vygotsky, 1978) discusses the theoretical construct of the “Zone of Proximal Development” where the

“more knowledgeable other” provides support to the students’ learning within the zone of proximal development as they collectively build bridges of understandings through social interaction” (Krauss, 1996, p. 20). Here Lucky’s family members supported and guided him to learning and making meaning of the story. Lucky’s brother was serious when he read to him he insisted that Lucky listen attentively not only for fun because he was expected to learn during the reading experience and demonstrate his learning after by testing him.

In primary school Lucky was introduced to reading by his teacher who first taught him the vowels and the consonants as they are used in isiZulu. He had to write these down on slates. His teacher gradually introduced them to phonics in isiZulu and then introduced them to words first and then later to sentences. It was here where Lucky learnt to read when the teacher made them repeat after them the sentence written on the board. He was taught how to handle a book, how to take care of a book and keep it clean. The teacher taught Lucky this as part of good practices associated with learning to read. The teacher in this case can be classified to Vygotsky’s (1978) “more knowledgeable other”. The teacher scaffolded and guided Lucky in teaching him how to read. Lucky also practiced reading at home with the help of his grandmother and brother. In Lucky’s experiences of and inter-personal interactions associated with reading, both at home and at school reading was done as an oral performance combined with associated learning, and the attention on getting it right.

Lucky’s high school experiences in reading were very different from those he had had in primary school. In primary school he had help and support but in high school he had no support. In high school Lucky was just given a story to read independently and the teacher only guided him by giving the overview of the story, he had to read and understand the text and its deeper meaning on his own. Lucky’s teachers expected learners to use a dictionary if they could not understand the meaning of a word. The teachers were preparing Lucky to read and make meaning on his own with the aid of a dictionary. The above description relates to The Landscape Model according to this model the child’s “Memory - Based View Processes are activated. Ideally, as a reader

reads a text, information in the text and other information that is activated in the working memory, will trigger a spread of activation through the reader's knowledge base, activating associated information. This spread of activation can occur through the episodic memory representation that the reader has constructed of the text so far as well as through his or her semantic (background) knowledge" (Kendeou, Rapp & van den Broek, 2005, p. 301). "From a *memory based perspective*, each word, phrase, or concept that a reader processes triggers an automatic spread of activation to other, related words and concepts in memory for the text read so far and background knowledge" (Rapp & van den Broek, 2005, p. 276). Therefore Lucky had to read independently in high school without the aid of the teacher by activating his "Memory – Based Processes." As Lucky read independently, information from the text activated his knowledge base. The words he could not comprehend he tried to find in the dictionary and he was able to activate his background knowledge by making meaning of the current text. Lucky admitted that he felt this task difficult because he had to try to make meaning on his own. Working in English, his first additional language brought greater difficulty to his understanding.

Rose (2005) states that learners in middle to upper primary level should be learning to learn from reading and to show their understanding of what they have read. This phase should equip the learner with the skills that are required in secondary schooling, which include independently learning from reading. Lucky's teacher in primary school used to read the text out to them. The text was read repeatedly until Lucky could show understanding. The teacher would explain each line of the text. Lucky was given to read the same text and he had to explain what he understood of the text. Lucky's interaction with literacy texts in high school expected him to be able to learn from reading and make understanding on his own a skill he should have mastered in middle and upper primary level.

Lucky felt his reading experiences in tertiary education also very demanding. He attended Mpumalanga College of Education as part of his tertiary education where he studied for his Diploma in Education. Lucky furthered his studies and graduated with

other qualifications. Lucky had to acquire a degree of independence in order to succeed in acquiring the above qualifications. During his tertiary studies Lucky was exposed to reading material that he found overwhelming and difficult to understand. He never relied only on the lecturer but he used the media especially the radio to help him learn. Lucky used to listen to the English stories over the radio and tried to make meaning of what was said. Lucky exposed himself to these self-enrichment strategies to assist himself to cope with English in College. Lucky was morally trained when his brother read to him when he was a child. He knew that he needed to listen attentively, because he was aware that he would be tested by his brother after the reading. It is possible that because of this, when Lucky listened to the radio he was able to listen attentively to what was being broadcast. He also read English newspapers that he said helped him immensely.

### **Pinky:**

Pinky the second participant in this research remembered the following as to how she learnt to read. Pinky's mum was the first person who taught her how to hold a pen and write all the vowels. She learnt to write the vowels before going to school. This is very unusual (Pretorius, 2002) and it would probably have been very difficult for her mother to make Pinky understand what vowels are, how they are used in words and also to teach her how to write them. However, her mother was clearly trying to introduce her to these aspects of reading and writing at a very early age. Her mother used to read to her every night. Pinky's mother questioned her after she read the story to see if she understood the story. This is the same strategy Lucky's brother used when he read to him. This could be a common strategy that they used to ensure understanding was taking place.

The story books her mother read to her were *Goldilocks*, *The Three Bears*, *Cinderella*, *The Birth of Christ* and scary stories about cannibals. All these stories were in English and the mother helped Pinky make meaning by translating them to isiZulu. Her mother



read the story out in English and to make Pinky understand she translated as she went on. Pinky's grandmother also assisted in teaching her how to read. The grandmother used to read the bible in IsiZulu every night to Pinky. Her grandmother also read from the hymn book. She helped Pinky to understand the meaning of the words in the hymn book. Her grandmother would ask questions to ensure Pinky understood the content. Her grandmother was very instrumental in inculcating a habit that Pinky always read before she goes to bed. In terms of socio-constructivist theory (Vygotsky, 1978) her mother and grandmother can be seen as the "more knowledgeable other" who assisted Pinky in helping her to make understanding of reading.

Pinky's experiences in reading in primary school began with her exposure to picture reading. This was the first step that her teachers used in developing her reading in primary school. The teacher stuck a picture on the chalkboard and pasted words next to the picture. Pinky had to study the picture and then chose a word that best described the picture. This technique helped Pinky to recognize the words and she also had to pronounce the words. The teachers then made her write the word down on the board and later on she had to use this word to make up a sentence. They were made to do this task at least three times a week.

The teachers emphasized the decoding aspect of reading, and the pictures assisted her in making meaning of the words. Pinky was taught to read in IsiZulu in Grade 1. She was first introduced to English in Grade 2 and the first book she read from was called "English Through Activity, Going for a Walk" (Arnold & Varty, 1973). She had to read sentences from this book and at the same time had to carry out the action, for example "I am standing. I am sitting". The writers of this book suggested carrying out each action as the words for it was read, so that the reader would associate the experience of the action with the written word representing it. Pinky's primary school life motivated her to read because her teachers told her that information is always hidden in books. If she needed to know anything and to understand what is happening around her, she had to read. Pinky did not have access to many books, but she remembered borrowing a book by Shakespeare, called "Julius Caesar" from her neighbour's children. The neighbour's

children had to help her to understand the English as it was very difficult for her to read it on her own and make meaning. Pinky was desperate, and she would try to read any book she could lay her hand on.

The above analysis indicates that Vygotsky's notion of the "more knowledgeable other" (1978) features in this case in relation to the primary school teachers and the neighbour's children who guided and assisted Pinky's reading learning pattern.

Pinky's reading development in primary school equipped her to adapt to high school reading. She was faced with limited support from teachers in high school. In high school the teachers just gave her a comprehension passage and she had to read and make meaning on her own, therefore Pinky had to use a dictionary to help her make meaning of the text. This is exactly the same scenario Lucky went through as he progressed from primary school into high school. Lucky was also left to his own devices to learn reading independently. Similarly, Pinky also had to learn to make meaning on her own. Again, as described in the Landscape Model, "Memory – Based Processes" (Kendeou, Rapp & van den Broek, 2005), memory had to be activated in order for Pinky to make meaning of the text. In primary school Pinky was taught to make meaning of the text by reading it aloud to the teacher. The teacher would stop her during her reading and asked her to explain what she had read. The teacher would guide her and assist her to make her understand the text. The teacher would only discuss the comprehension passage the next day and she had to correct her mistakes.

Pinky's reading experiences in tertiary institution were a challenge to her to make meaning on her own. During her tertiary studies she was not privileged to have a lecturer who could have taught her how to understand academic content because she obtained her education qualifications through correspondence. She relied on her husband to assist her to make meaning of academic content because he was also studying. Pinky also sought assistance from a principal in nearby school to help her make meaning of the texts.

Pinky's lecturers only came once a year and they spent a very little time with her so she had to read and understand all the material that they left on her own. Pinky was left to her own devices to learn to read and understand academic content. In college Pinky was trained to teach reading in classrooms by using newspapers. They encouraged her to use newspapers as they contained information that could be used in the classroom to teach reading and writing. Pinky could take an article and read it to the class. They could have a class discussion on the contents of the text, look at pictures and predict what the article might be about, and study headings, identifying paragraphs, learn new words and study adverts. The college staff told her that newspapers were an easy resource to get and that she could use the newspapers to teach reading in the classroom. One of the reasons why Pinky used newspapers in the classrooms was because the Department of Education did not supply textbooks which she could use as a resource to teach reading. Another significant factor to reflect on is that the use of newspapers as a resource to teach reading, Pinky would have had to acquire great skill, understanding and confidence in order to successfully teach reading using a newspaper as a resource. In South Africa our teachers are not trained to do this adequately. Once again Vygotsky's (1978) theory resonates and Pinky's husband and the school principal can be seen as the "more knowledgeable other" who helped her to make understanding.

The above analysis addresses the first research question regarding how these Intermediate Phase Teachers were taught how to read. The important aspect here is the people who helped develop Pinky's and Lucky's reading ability. These people are referred to as the "more knowledgeable other" (Krauss, 1996) who are able to lead them in their reading and teaching development. What Vygotsky's theory implies is that children and adults will not learn on their own but will learn with the aid of someone more knowledgeable who can guide and assist in their learning. The "*more knowledgeable other*" can be someone who has more understanding or higher development level than the child as they are aware of the learner's capabilities and offer their guidance and assistance in aiding the child in their learning (Krauss, 1996, p.61).

Therefore Vygotsky's (1978) Social Constructivism theory features prominently in this research question.

### **5.3. How were these educators trained to teach reading?**

Whilst Lucky was studying at the college of education he was trained to teach reading in the following way. He was exposed to a variety of reading strategies like scanning, skimming and intensive reading. The lecturers gave him a text to read and they taught him how to look for specific information in the text. They also taught him how to read the text for a general understanding of it. Lucky said they emphasized reading newspapers to help him make meaning of critical aspects of written texts. Lucky said his exposure to newspapers enhanced his understanding of intensive global reading, by which he meant that he was able to read a variety of texts that relate to in-depth understanding of important information. He was taught how to use these strategies to enhance reading for meaning.

During a reading workshop at college the lecturers discussed these strategies. They showed him how to use these strategies in the classroom when teaching reading. Learners can use these different strategies to identify the main theme or look for specific information. Lucky states that his lecturer also equipped him to understand critical aspects of texts, and to read a text for a deeper meaning by discussing the main purpose and message of the text. The lecturers encouraged Lucky to read and widen his knowledge pertaining to global or international news. He was exposed to these reading strategies when he attended a teaching development workshop as part of his module at college. Although Lucky attended few reading strategy workshops in college he felt that this training adequately developed him to teach reading. The training that Lucky received whilst at college failed to train him sufficiently to teach reading. Vygotsky's (1978) "more knowledgeable other" features again in the above analysis. Even though Lucky's lecturers did not adequately equip him with the knowledge to teach reading they did try to some extent to expose him to reading strategies. It is a probability that Lucky's lecturers themselves lacked knowledge about how to teach

reading. However lecturers can be seen as the “more knowledgeable others” who guided and developed Lucky.

Pinky studied part-time through correspondence, and was not given direct help by any of her lecturers as often as she would have liked. When she met with her lecturers once a year, they just left vast amounts of study material for her to study on her own. Pinky’s lecturers cannot be regarded as the MKOs as Pinky was left on her own devices to learn. Pinky had to learn by herself how to teach reading in the classroom. It is important to note that Pinky learnt no teaching to read skills whilst studying through correspondence.

#### **5.4. What strategies do these educators use to teach reading?**

The following are some of the strategies used by Lucky when he teaches reading. During his interview, Lucky said that when he teaches reading, he emphasizes teaching reading for meaning. He labelled reading for meaning as “intensive reading”. Lucky had the following to say when he teaches intensive reading:

Alright. In fact the learner must read. He can use both, skimming and scanning. Of the outcomes that are supposed is known the meanings of the words, ja – able to answer questions.

From the above quotation Lucky makes use of the strategies that he learnt in college to teach reading for meaning. In college as far as Lucky could recall, there was nearly nothing in his training about teaching reading. The only reading strategies he learnt was skimming and scanning. The lecturers only taught him these strategies when he was exposed to “intensive reading.” Lucky sees “Intensive reading” as reading for meaning. When he teaches reading for meaning in his classes, Lucky applies these strategies as a way to teach his learners how to make meaning of the text. He explained that when he teaches intensive reading he tells his learners to use skimming and scanning as ways to relate and make meaning of the text.

When I observed Lucky teaching a Grade 6 class a poem, he asked them if they could identify a figure of speech in the poem. The learners found it difficult to do this. The dialogue as noted under point number 4.4 of chapter four records the interaction that occurred between Lucky and his class when he was teaching them a poem. It shows that Lucky failed to explain to the learners the relevance of the poem. Before he could begin the poem Lucky did not ask his learners questions on what they thought the poem is all about. He failed to activate their prior knowledge by asking them what they understood by the title of the poem. He failed to explain to the class what the content or message of the poem was, and instead asked them to identify the figure of speech in the poem. He did not give them a pre-reading exercise or an example of a figure of speech that they may have learnt before. Lucky asked the learners to identify a figure of speech in the poem. The learners could not identify one. Lucky mistakenly identified the phrase “We learn things as we grow” in the poem as a simile, presumably because it has the word “as” in the phrase. Lucky had incorrectly identified the phrase as a simile.

Lucky had failed to activate their prior knowledge as per the Landscape Model technique. The learners were confused and he just continued as shown in the transcript without telling them what the poem was about. From the analysis of the dialogue Lucky failed to teach according to Landscape Model successfully. In this model the reader comprehends the sentences of a text by linking the meaning they access in each word and sentence. They do this by linking the meaning they have accessed from the word, clause or sentence they have just read, with the meaning of the next words as they read them, while their memories are activated, allowing their background knowledge to come into play in making meaning of the words, sentence, and whole text. Memory-based and constructionist processes are the essential components of the Landscape Model. “Together these processes are responsible for the activation of concepts and the establishment of meaningful connections between concepts during reading” (Kendeou, Rapp & van den Broek, 2005, p. 299). Lucky did not ensure that his learners understood each element of the poem, nor did he encourage learners to try to associate relevant

background knowledge with the content or meaning of the poem, so he failed to help his learners develop the reading skills described in the Landscape Model.

When I interviewed Lucky he had the following to say about how he taught reading in the classroom. He always encourages his learners that when they read something they must know the outcome of the story. What Lucky means by 'outcome' is that after learners have read a text or a story, they should know the meaning of all the words and sentences in it. He explained that after the learners have read the story he asks them questions to assess whether they have understood the outcome of the story. Lucky uses this strategy with his learners probably because when he was young his brother used to read to him and thereafter asked him questions to test his understanding of the story. It seems that Lucky has internalised his brother's strategy and he uses this strategy in his own classroom.

Rose (2006) states that teachers who simply question learners after they have read a text fail to realize that this strategy does not help the children to understand the text. Teachers tend to ask questions but only the more able students will answer and the less able ones just sit quiet without understanding. "Teachers continually ask 'monitoring questions' to check students' understandings. Only a minority of students are continually successful at answering the teachers' questions. Successful students are continually affirmed and eventually develop identities as independent learners. Unsuccessful students are continually negated and eventually experience schooling as being unpleasant" (Rose, 2006, pp. 6-7). David Rose's point is that when teachers get learners to read something, and then ask them questions, they are testing learners' understanding of what they have read. He maintains that before you start asking questions to see if they have understood, teachers should first show learners how to get at the meaning in a text. They should do this by showing them how to identify the main point, showing them how to take note of hints and allusions in text, explain how comparisons work, showing them how metaphors and similes work with the meaning. This is all part of supporting learners as they develop reading strategies. As one can

see, this is entirely different from allowing learners to just identify a figure of speech or questioning them on what they have read. That is what “teaching by testing” means.

What Lucky said in the interview was different from what was observed in his classroom. In the interview Lucky said that he encourages his learners to understand the meaning of the words and sentences as they read a text. Observation of Lucky’s class showed that when he was teaching the poem he failed to explain the poem in detail. He neglected to brainstorm the title or get the learners’ responses about what they thought the poem means. Therefore the learners were lost during his interpretation of the poem. Lucky failed to discuss words that they did not understand. Learners had no idea of the meaning or understanding of words used in the poem. As a result the learners could not answer Lucky’s questions and they could not relate to the meaning of the poem.

Pinky, on the other hand, uses the following strategies when she teaches reading. Pinky teaches her children how to read by firstly introducing them to the pictures. This is the same strategy Pinky’s teacher used when Pinky was learning how to read in primary school.

The dialogue shown in the transcript as noted under point 4.7 of chapter four indicates how Pinky introduces a novel to the class. She used a strategy where she begins with the front cover of the book to activate the learners’ memories. She encourages the learners to read out the title and look at the pictures on the cover of the book. The learners look at the pictures and they try to make meaning of what they are viewing. Each time the learners describe what they are seeing in the picture, Pinky questions them on their observations. This strategy helps Pinky in activating their prior knowledge which is essential in making meaning and showing understanding. In this case she asked the learners to read out the title of the book. She asked them to deconstruct the title so that they could understand the words which will allow them to predict what the story will be about. Pinky helps her learners develop skills described in the Landscape Model in order to make meaning of what they are reading.



Pinky guides and assists her learners by initiating their prior knowledge when she teaches them reading. She links what they are reading to their lives. This enables learners to make meaning by relating parts of their life situations to the story. Lucky on the other hand failed to activate and stimulate his learners as part of teaching them the poem. He failed to use their background knowledge to assist them in understanding of the poem.

The dialogue shown in the transcript as noted under point 4.7 of chapter four indicates how Pinky teaches reading for meaning by emphasizing vocabulary and the construction of sentences as being of vital importance. This aspect helped the learners to understand the words used in the text so that they would be able to show their understanding of the content. Pinky used strategies to activate the learners' memories by asking them what they understood by the topic or title of the text. Pinky deployed concepts described in the "Landscape Model" (Kendeou, Rapp & van den Broek, 2005) to help her learners make meaning of the text as follows. She started off by showing the learners a picture. She activated their prior knowledge. She then made them read the text and they started to bring in their prior knowledge and integrated these thoughts with what they are reading presently. At the same time these learners also took into account the previous sentences they had just read with the text they were currently reading and they used all this information to try to make meaning of what they had read. Therefore the learners were constructing meaning for themselves. Pinky used a variety of strategies to teach reading, including the jigsaw strategy, where she cut up the sentences and mixed them up and she got the learners to put them in the correct order. Pinky used this strategy to test if the learners understood the text by putting together the pieces, just like completing a puzzle. Learners are able to connect the pieces together, thus showing their understanding of the text.

### **5.5. How does participation in the UKZN reading project influence the educators understanding of teaching reading?**

The UKZN reading team of experts under the leadership of Mrs Sandra Land conducted a number of reading workshops at the educators' primary school. The aim of these workshops was to teach educators new strategies on how to teach reading. These workshops covered aspects that could enhance the level of teaching reading. Some of the aspects touched on in the workshop were as follows: reading for different purposes, scanning for particular information, skimming to get a general idea of what a piece of text says, browsing for casual interest, reading maps, charts, graphs, diagrams to get information, reading instructions, reading for entertainment, reading to discover things, reading to learn, reading to find underlying meaning, proofreading and correcting text. Fluency and its importance in relation to understanding were discussed.

Lucky felt that the workshops were very stimulating and enriching and that he had learnt a lot from them. The workshops helped him gain valuable insight and equipped him with new strategies to teach reading. He felt that these workshops helped him to grow professionally and he was able to make a difference in his learners' lives. Pinky also believes that she gained tremendously from these reading workshops. She learnt new strategies of how to use newspapers as a resource in the classroom and how to use these strategies to teach reading for meaning and understanding. Pinky described her gains from these workshops in these words:

Yes, yes, from the way I can see that the way they are handling reading now because at the beginning of the year when I said, ja, just reading the story you can just see by looking at the page that they don't like the story that I show them, they just like that listening and you cannot say a person when he is looking at you, whether he is listening or thinking about something else, but now they like to have their books and read and read, all eager to read.

Pinky believes that these workshops have taught her so much about reading that her learners are now enjoying reading.

When I observed Pinky teaching her class reading I noticed that she asked the class to look at the cover of the book first and then asked them a series of questions relating to the title and the picture of the book. Pinky learnt this strategy in the workshop. It helps in pre-reading activities to activate the learners' prior knowledge. This strategy is linked to the "Landscape Model" where learners try to make meaning of a word or sentence by activating their prior knowledge and at the same time trying to construct meaning of what they are currently reading by using their prior knowledge and the words or sentences they have just read to help them make meaning of the word. When Pinky reads in her class the learners watch how she reads and they try to emulate her. Pinky is seen as the "More Knowledgeable Other" (MKO) (Vygotsky, 1978), so when she reads she demonstrates to the class the proper way to read.

## **5.6 Inter-generational learning**

Both of the participants had older people in their families who played a key role in teaching them how to read prior to them attending school. In Lucky's case his grandmother was the first person who read stories to him. His grandmother used her own methods and strategies to teach Lucky how to read. His mother, who was fortunate to study up to standard 6 was educated by the missionaries in the area, and also read to him. She always encouraged him to learn and to become like her employer's children. Her employer used to give her books, which she brought home and she read to Lucky. His elder brother also read to him. He used to insist that Lucky paid attention when he read and asked him questions after reading the story to see what he understood and remembered.

Pinky's mother was instrumental in her educational development prior to her attending school. Her mother taught her how to hold a pen and demonstrated writing skills to her for example showing her how to write the vowels. Her grandmother also read to her. Every night her grandmother used to read the bible to her which was in isiZulu. Although her grandmother was a poor reader she tried her level best to help in her reading development. The social context in which children are raised impacts on their

academic progress in school. Rose (2005) asserts that if children are supported at home, and are read to by their parents, they will later flourish into independent readers. From the above analysis both participants were lucky to have adults who read to them and exposed them early to books. These adults initiated this role as they were aware on the significance of exposing children to books at a very early age. Lucky's grandmother was the first person to introduce Lucky to the world of books. She was instrumental in expanding his knowledge and fascination with the fairytale world. Lucky's mother brought books home from her employer so that she could read to him. Their intention was to expose Lucky to many story books as possible so to equip him for primary school.

Pinky also had her grandmother who read to her. Although the grandmother was not a competent reader herself she still showed initiative in inducting Pinky to reading. Her mother taught her the basic skills on how to hold a pen and introduced her to the basic aspects of writing. This is very unusual for a parent in a home with limited literacy skills; Pretorius (2002) highlights this when she stated that many children come from a largely oral culture in which literacy practices are virtually non-existent because of the adults' poor education levels. In spite of that Pinky's mother taught her the basic skills of how to hold a pen and introduced her to the basic aspects of writing. Both these skills are imperative in primary school. Rose (2005) stresses the importance of a child being exposed to books at an early age. He believed that the child's social context impacts on their academic progress in school. What Rose (2005) is stating here is that if children had the advantage of being read to prior to their entrance to school they are more likely to succeed in school than learners who were not exposed to this. Hence parent-child reading before school is the first stage in a curriculum of reading skills.

On the other hand not all children are as fortunate as our participants; if they are not supported with reading at home they will be subject to the 'Mathew effect' (Pretorius, 2002). As children work through the different stages of schooling they increasingly require the ability to independently learn from reading. If children do not have sufficient reading skills at the beginning of schooling they are likely to fall further and further behind students who have these skills. Poor readers read less and less. The result

(known as the 'Mathew effect') is that the already skilled readers get more and more of what readers need in order to continue developing and extending their reading skills, and the poor readers get less and less (Stanovich, 1986). What Pretorius (2002) is highlighting is that parents who expose their children to books at an early age give them an advantage in school because they will cope with the demands made on them at school, unlike to those parents who do not expose their children to books. These children will be at a disadvantage because they will find it difficult to keep up and they will fall behind with the demands made on them at school.

## **5.7 Poverty**

Poverty is a strong theme that featured in data gathered for this research. Both participants were affected by poverty as they grew up. Lucky grew up in a rural area with no modern infrastructure. His mother was employed as a domestic worker and worked for a white family. Although she earned little, she tried to educate Lucky. He had to attend a primary school which was about 5km from his house. The school was overcrowded and Lucky was taught to read under a tree. Lucky was also affected when he went to high school. He had to attend three different high schools because of the political violence in the area. This violence had a serious effect on his education. The difficulties and hardship Lucky endured posed a barrier to his education.

Pinky also grew up in a rural area. She came from a very humble background. Pinky's father left them when she was a baby. Her mother had to do sewing to earn a menial income. They also relied on the grandmother's pension money. When Pinky was in Standard 5 she became very ill and had to live with her neighbour. The reason for Pinky's ill-health was because there was no food at home. Pinky had to go to bed hungry sometimes and that was the reason why she went to stay with her neighbour. The neighbour would feed her and she stayed with them for most of her teenage years. Subsequently her reading development was hampered because of the poverty of her family.

Learners who live in abject poverty may gain very little background knowledge. These learners are not exposed to things like libraries, television, internet or given the opportunity for going on a holiday and experiencing anything other than what they know from everyday life. According to Rose (2005), “Literate family backgrounds establish a positive environment for parent-child reading that helps in their development as independent readers. On the other hand children from oral family backgrounds are able to engage in the pleasures and identities of reading for the first time” only when they go to school (Rose, 2005, p. 149). In our SA context many children come from homes that are poverty stricken or offer very little exposure to print material. These children are disadvantaged when it comes to reading independently. Pinky and Lucky’s exposure to books at an early age helped them to relate to reading in primary school.

## **5.8 Conclusion**

The data presented and analyzed in this chapter describes the themes that have emanated from describing the participants history on how they learnt to read and how equipped they are now to teach reading in their classrooms. It is important to note that both participants used strategies to teach reading in their own classrooms that were used on them when they were taught how to read.

**6.1 Introduction**

The study aimed to investigate the reading life histories of two educators, focusing on how they were taught to read and came to understand reading, and how this understanding has shaped their teaching of reading in the classroom. The intention of this research was to track the participants' reading development history prior to them entering primary school up to their completion of tertiary education and beyond. The research was conducted in a rural primary school outside Pietermaritzburg. Both participants were purposively selected for the purpose of this research. Two language educators teaching English were chosen as the participants. Both these educators teach in the Intermediate Phase of primary school. The intention of this study was to investigate the following research questions.

- What are these Intermediate and Senior phase Educators' experiences of learning reading?
- How were these teachers trained to teach reading?
- What strategies do these teachers use to teach reading?
- How does participation in the UKZN Reading Project influence the teachers' understanding of teaching reading?

This research was grounded in the interpretive paradigm and a life history approach was utilized. I used this approach because I was curious and fascinated to learn the reading life histories of both my participants. Data was gathered by interviewing both the participants, and classroom observations of their teaching practice were carried out. Semi-structured interviews were carried out which allowed the participants flexibility to answer the questions more elaborately. An observation schedule was designed to observe the participants teaching reading to their classes. Ethical considerations were constantly adhered to throughout this study. Participants were informed that their identities would be protected and pseudonyms would be used in the study. The purpose

and the aims of the study were clearly explained to the participants to ensure their familiarity with the research.

## **6.2 Early childhood reading experiences**

The participants' life history account regarding their reading experiences during their childhood years yielded data that indicated that both participants came from impoverished social backgrounds. They were exposed to the challenges of poverty and political violence which disrupted their educational experiences. Lucky's life was profoundly affected by political violence which prompted his family to relocate several times resulting in the disruption of his educational development. Both participants suffered because of apartheid policies and they were not exposed to the comfort of well resourced schools. Despite of all this, both participants had families who valued literacy. Both the participants' families engaged in only limited literacy practices, yet they valued literacy and they knew the advantages that it could bring. In order for a child to learn to read effectively in their primary level, their past interaction with educational activities is important (Bielby, 1999, & Pretorius, 2002). Bielby's explanation points to the challenges that face our children in schools when it comes to learning reading. Many SA children come from homes where they are not exposed to much print material and families tend to have very limited literacy practices. Yet, the families of both the participants in this study did try to pass on and inculcate good values and positive attitudes towards literacy and reading.

The families promoted reading to their children, yet for both families there was a particular slant to their reading activities of literacy. Both families related to reading in a very particular way, because each time they read to their children they warned them to listen attentively because they would be questioned after they read. Rose (2005) in his research of reading highlights a reading strategy known as 'shared reading'. This strategy is partly modeled on parent-child reading practices, in which books are read repeatedly, usually at the request of the children, and this enhances the children's



understanding of and pleasure in the story. It promotes learners' engagement in the pleasure of reading. The contrast between this practice and the experiences of participants in this study is that when the participants' parents read to them it wasn't for pleasure as highlighted in Rose (2005), as their parents took reading as a serious learning activity. The parents of both participants were very positive when they read to their children. The parents' vision for their children was for them to become acquainted with literacy at a young age so that they could enhance themselves and have better opportunities in life. Their parents put everything they had into reading to ensure that their children could have a better life, and they did this by being very serious and not playing with their children when they read. Their children certainly learnt some of the mechanical skills of reading but they did not learn what children from more advantaged homes learn, for example that reading is casual, or that a child can curl up with a book on a chair, or get lost in a book and nobody would ever question them or ask them what they had learnt.

The participants' parents probably adopted the reading strategy they did because this would have been the way in which they were taught to read and they exported these ideas when they read to their children. Their children were not encouraged to get a book and read for their own fun. Their parents aim was to get their children to understand that their reading to them was to develop their formal learning associated with morals and values on how to live their life, rather than allowing them access to the freedom of the world of literacy and literary pleasures. Although both families were exposed to limited reading material they saw reading and reading activities as a key to success and to give their children a key out of poverty.

Pinky's mother even helped her to learn to write before she went to school. Both families were very set on using literacy practices to benefit their children in a formal way. Probably this often happens in families with limited literacy practices, who do not realize that reading for fun is actually one of the most powerful things that they could use. They see reading as being serious, so they do it seriously perhaps believing that it should not be playful. The parents of these participants felt that for learning to happen it should be serious in nature and then only it would be proper.

When the participants attended primary school and secondary school their teachers failed to adequately teach them reading skills. When Lucky attended primary school he was taught under a tree due to lack of classroom space, as was often the case in under-resourced schools in the apartheid schooling system. Also, the limited teacher training given to Black teachers under apartheid is likely to have meant that their teachers could have been inadequately trained to teach reading.

The life history approach used in this study helped to track the participants' reading history from their early years of childhood to their inception to primary school and beyond. The adults involved in the participants' life namely, their parents, other family members and teachers can be seen as the "more knowledgeable other" (Vygotsky, 1978 p. 86). Vygotskian theory on learning states that children will not learn certain skills on their own but will learn them with the aid of someone more knowledgeable who can guide and assist in their learning. The "more knowledgeable other" can be someone who has a better understanding or a higher development level than the child as they are able to understand the learner's capabilities and offer their guidance and assistance in aiding the child to extend their learning. The "more knowledgeable other" (the adults) aided the development of the participants by scaffolding and guiding them from the known to the unknown as depicted by Vygotsky's concept (1978, p. 86) of the "zone of proximal development (zpd)". Krauss (1996) claims that the "zpd" is the domain in which individuals can attain learning goals with the assistance and direction of the "more knowledgeable other". Although these adults themselves did not have sophisticated literacy practices they took the role of "more knowledgeable other" who promoted the participants' learning.

### **6.3 How were they trained to teach reading?**

Pinky's history of how she was trained to teach reading reflects that she taught herself how to teach reading. This is because she studied through correspondence. Although some institutions offer good correspondence courses, hers did not offer much reading support. She had to read and make understanding on her own regarding her studying

material. Her husband helped her out where he could. Lucky on the other hand studied at college. His lecturers barely taught him any reading strategies except for skimming and scanning. Lucky also had to learn on his own. Both participants used newspapers as a resource to practice reading.

Ultimately neither of them were adequately trained to teach reading, and consequently did not fully understand what reading is, how it functions and how to teach reading skills. They had no option but to default to their childhood strategies that they learnt at their homes and at school. They have adopted the attitude of their own parents and other family members that coloured their early reading experiences. This was obvious from observations of their teaching reading in their classrooms, when they used the same strategies that their parents had used with them in their teaching. They fall back on or default to these because these are the only strategies they know.

When I observed Lucky teaching a Grade 6 class a poem, Lucky failed to explore the relevance of the poem in relation to the learners' context. Lucky did not ask his learners questions on what they thought the poem was all about. He failed to activate their prior knowledge by asking them what they understood by the title of the poem. He failed to explain to the class what the content or message of the poem was, and instead asked them to identify a figure of speech in the poem, which in fact he had wrongly identified himself. He did not give them a pre-reading exercise or an example of a figure of speech that they may have learnt before. Lucky failed to get the learners to respond as per the "Landscape Model" (Kendeou, Rapp & van den Broek, 2005).

Pinky, on the other hand, guided and assisted her learners by referring to their prior knowledge when she taught them reading. She linked what they were reading to their lives. This enabled learners to make meaning by relating parts of their life situations to the story. Lucky on the other hand failed to activate and stimulate his learners in this way as part of teaching them the poem, and failed to use their background knowledge to assist them in understanding of the poem. Pinky used strategies to activate the learners' memories by asking them what they understood by the topic or title of the text.

Pinky deployed concepts described in the "Landscape Model" of reading (Kendeou, Rapp & van den Broek, 2005).

Overall, Lucky's teaching of reading was adequate in that he tried to get his learners to understand the content of the poem. It was inadequate in that he failed to use strategies to activate his learners' background knowledge in enabling them to comprehend the poem from their own experiences. Pinky's teaching of reading was adequate in that she asked learners questions pertaining to the pictures on the cover of the book and about the title before she could start reading the book. She was able to adopt strategies to activate their prior knowledge to some extent.

These teachers cannot be blamed for the way in which they teach reading, since this is the best they know. They are doing the best they can, and interestingly they believe that they were well trained. They believe that their teaching of reading in their classrooms was working well, and they never felt that it was not effective for them. They cannot know what they do not know, and since they did not have the benefit of better, more adequate training, they do not know that far better strategies for teaching reading exist. So the norm for them was established by how their teachers and their parents taught them to read, and they adopted these strategies to teach reading in their classrooms. They cannot be expected to know that they were badly trained since their training fulfilled their expectations. However, this study revealed that they were inadequately trained. They did not seek out new strategies, and do not know that they do not know, because of the limited literacy skills in their homes, the second rate apartheid schooling, their inadequate training, and their own limited awareness of what reading is and what reading should be.

#### **6.4 Influence of the UKZN reading project**

Both participants felt that the workshops were a positive, enriching development experience for them. They say the workshops are all wonderful but it would be highly unlikely that they could have gained enough knowledge in such short space of time to

bring about a phenomenal change in their teaching of reading in their classrooms. In reality we know that a few workshops would not bring about drastic change to the reading world for them. However, the workshops may have provided a glimpse or little taste of the world of literacy practices. These workshops could have triggered something in them if they felt they gained some knowledge about what they do not know, even if the workshops just opened up the door, and led them to think that maybe they should find out more about reading. They might want to learn more about reading strategies they could implement in their classrooms.

## **6.5 Recommendations**

What would possibly have helped these two educators is the following list of recommendations:

- It is imperative for teachers especially in the Foundation Phase to learn about 'Shared Reading', and reading stories to children, which is arguably the most successful way to get them engrossed in reading. Teachers need to read a lot to their learners to get them stimulated so that they can start building their own understandings of stories.
- Teachers should create a positive learning environment. Learners should be inspired when they walk into a classroom. The classroom should have appropriate charts and resources for learning and teaching to take place. When I observed both my participants' classrooms there were very limited visual stimulation to entice learners into learning.

- Reading resources were non-existent in my participants' classrooms. Teachers should strive to create their own mini library and resource centre in their classroom. This is likely to attract learners to different genres of books.
- Pre-reading activities are a must. Teachers are failing to activate their learners' prior knowledge before embarking on reading a text. This strategy, for example looking at a picture or title of the book, helps the learners to relate to and make meaning of the text. This helps the child to predict what the story is about.
- Run training workshops for parents especially in rural areas to encourage them to introduce their children to reading for fun at home. Insist that the government fulfils its duty to supply schools with literacy resources.
- Lastly teacher training institutions should give teachers thorough training in how to encourage enjoyment in reading, and how to teach reading so that teachers are better prepared.

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## Appendix 1:

## Ethical Clearance



24 June 2012

Mr Rakesh Sivnarain (207528170)  
School of Education

Dear Mr Sivnarain

Protocol reference number: HSS/0430/012M

Project title: Teaching reading: A life history study of two language educators in a rural primary school in KwaZulu-Natal

### EXPEDITED APPROVAL

I wish to inform you that your application has been granted Full Approval through an expedited review process:

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the school/department for a period of 5 years.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

  
.....  
Professor Steven Collings (Chair)  
/ms

cc Sandra Land  
cc Academic Leader Dr MN Davids  
cc School Admin. Mr N Memela / Mrs S Naicker

Professor S Collings (Chair)  
Humanities & Social SC Research Ethics Committee  
Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building  
Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban, 4000, South Africa  
Telephone: +27 (0)31 260 3587/8350 Facsimile: +27 (0)31 260 4609 Email: ximbop@ukzn.ac.za / snymanm@ukzn.ac.za  
Founding Campuses: ■ Edgewood ■ Howard College ■ Medical School ■ Pietermaritzburg ■ Westville

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Education  
KWAZULU-NATAL

Enquiries: Sibusiso Alwar

Tel: 033 341 8610

Ref.:2/4/8/200

**Sandra Land, Mitasha Nehal, Jeff Mkhize, Nkanyenzi Cele, Audrey Pillay, Rakesh Sivnarain, Mhlengi Shabane and Nazarana Mather**

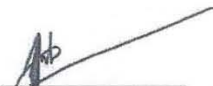
Centre for Adult Education  
School of Education and Development  
University of KwaZulu Natal  
Private bag X01  
SCOTTSVILLE  
3209

Dear Sandra Land et al.

**PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE KZN DoE INSTITUTIONS**

Your application to conduct research entitled: **Developing a Reading Culture among Adults and Children at a Foundation Level in a School-Based Learning Community**, in the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education Institutions has been approved. The conditions of the approval are as follows:

1. The researcher will make all the arrangements concerning the research and interviews.
2. The researcher must ensure that Educator and learning programmes are not interrupted.
3. Interviews are not conducted during the time of writing examinations in schools.
4. Learners, Educators, Schools and Institutions are not identifiable in any way from the results of the research.
5. A copy of this letter is submitted to District Managers, Principals and Heads of Institutions where the intended research and interviews are to be conducted.
6. The period of investigation is limited to the period from 01 May 2012 to 31 December 2013.
7. Your research and interviews will be limited to the schools you have proposed and approved by the Head of Department. Please note that Principals, Educators, Departmental Officials and Learners are under no obligation to participate or assist you in your investigation.
8. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey at the school(s), please contact Mr. Alwar at the contact numbers below.
9. Upon completion of the research, a brief summary of the findings, recommendations or a full report / dissertation / thesis must be submitted to the research office of the Department. Please address it to The Director-Resources Planning, Private Bag X9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200.
10. Please note that your research and interviews will be limited to the following schools and institution:
- 10.1 Maqongqo Primary School and the attached Adult Learning Centre

  
**Nkosinathi S.P. Sishi, PhD**  
Head of Department: Education

2012/06/11  
Date

...dedicated to service and performance  
beyond the call of duty.

**KWAZULU-NATAL DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

POSTAL: Private Bag X9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200, KwaZulu-Natal, Republic of South Africa

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Web: www.kzndee.gov.za

## OBSERVATION SCHEDULE

Educator: \_\_\_\_\_

Grade: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Time: \_\_\_\_\_

1. What approaches the teacher uses to teach reading?

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2. How is the lesson introduced?

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3. What resources are used to teach reading?

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4. Are there any books in the classroom e.g. reading corner, charts, stimulating material etc?

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5. What strategies are used to teach reading?

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6. How does the teacher activate the learners' prior knowledge?

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7. How do the teacher guide the learner to use their schemata and how this relates to their cognitive development of reading for understanding?

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8. Responses from the learners.

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9. What instructions and guidance is the teacher providing to help learners that are weak in reading?



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10. How grammar, vocabulary development and comprehension are taught?

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General

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## Appendix 4:

## Interview Schedule 1

### INTERVIEW SCHEDULE 1

1. Where were you born?

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2. Tell me about your family history.

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3. Describe the place where you were brought up as a child.

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4. What are some of your happiest and sad moments you experienced in your childhood years?

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5. Can you tell me anything about your educational development with your parents or your family as you were growing up prior to you attending primary school?

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6. Describe your family's reading background.

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7. Did anyone in your family read to you before you attended school?

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8. Who in your family you looked up to as a role model and why?

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9. Tell me about your primary school life.

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10. Describe the primary school you attended.

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11. How did the teachers help you to learn to read?

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12. What can you remember about the way you were taught to read?

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13. How was your reading developing as a young child?

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14. Where there any assistance from any family members who assisted you to learn reading at home?

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15. What motivated you to read and what books did you enjoy reading in primary school?

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INTERVIEW SCHEDULE 2

1. Which high school did you attend?

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2. Describe how your primary school reading experiences equipped you to handle high school.

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3. How did you feel about learning to read in primary school as compared to high school?

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4. How did your teachers in high school prepare you for reading for understanding?

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5. Describe your reading habits at home. (What you liked to read? Why?)

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6. What motivated you in becoming a teacher?

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7. Which tertiary education institution did you attend?

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8. Can you note any important changes in your life since becoming an educator?

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9. How were you taught to read and understand academic contents?

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10. How were you trained to teach reading?

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11. How do you think the way in which you learnt how to read has influenced the way in which you teach reading in your classroom?

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12. What strategies do you adopt in the classroom to teach reading for meaning?

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13. How do you activate learners' back ground knowledge when reading?

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14. How do you encourage the learners to use their knowledge from their experience and contexts to assist them in understanding how to learn to read?

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15. What have you learnt from the UKZN reading project that helped you to promote reading for understanding in your classroom?

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16. What is your opinion on the UKZN reading project in helping you to develop yourself professionally in order to help your learners to read for understanding?

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**LETTER OF CONSENT TO THE PRINCIPAL**

129 Sirkhod Road

Orient Heights

Pietermaritzburg

3201

20 August 2012

**The Principal**

**CONSENT TO CONDUCT RESEACH**

I am a M. Ed. Student (Student Number 207528170) at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg. In order to fulfil the requirements of the degree I am expected to conduct a research project. My research topic is: *Teaching reading: a life history study of two language educators in a rural primary school in KwaZulu- Natal.*

In this study, I envisage constructing a life history of two English educators, teaching reading to Grade 6 and Grade 7 classes in your school.

I would appreciate your permission to conduct research in your school. Please note that this is not an evaluation of performance or competence of educators. The identities of all who participate in this study will be protected in accordance with the code of ethics as stipulated by the University of KwaZulu-Natal. I undertake to uphold the autonomy of all participants and they will be free to withdraw from the research at any time without negative consequences. However, participants will be asked to complete a consent form. In the interest of the participants, feedback will be given to them at the end of the study. Please be advised that this research could be accepted for a possible publication in an academic journal.

My supervisor is Sandra Land who can be contacted on 033-2605497 at the School of Education, Pietermaritzburg Campus. My contact numbers are 0827033885, 033-3914678 (home). You may contact my supervisor or myself should you have any queries or questions you would like answered.

Yours faithfully

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R. Sivnarain



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**DECLARATION OF CONSENT BY PRINCIPAL**

**DECLARATION OF CONSENT**

I..... (full name of Principal) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and grant Mr R. Sivnarain permission to conduct research.

.....  
SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL

.....  
DATE

**LETTER OF CONSENT TO PARTICIPANTS**

129 Sirkhod Road  
Orient Heights  
Pietermaritzburg  
3201  
20 August 2012

Dear Participant

**PARTICIPATION IN A RESEARCH PROJECT**


I am a M. Ed. Student (Student Number 207528170) at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg. In order to fulfil the requirements of the degree I am expected to conduct a research project. My research topic is: *Teaching reading: a life history study of two language educators in a rural primary school in KwaZulu- Natal.*

I envisage constructing a life history of two English educators, teaching reading to Grade 6 and Grade 7 classes in your school. In this regard I have chosen your school because I believe that you will provide valuable input in extending the boundaries of our knowledge on this concept. In this regard I would greatly appreciate it if you could be a participant in my research project. Please note that this is not an evaluation of your performance or competence. The identities of all who participate in this study will be protected in accordance with the code of ethics as stipulated by the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

I undertake to uphold the autonomy of you as a participant and you will be free to withdraw from the research at any time without negative consequences. However, as a participant, you will be asked to complete a consent form. In the interest of you the participant, feedback will be given to you at the end of the study. Please be advised that this research could be accepted for a possible publication in an academic journal.

My supervisor is Sandra Land who can be contacted on 033-2605497 at the School of Education, Pietermaritzburg Campus. My contact numbers are 0827033885, 033-3914678 (home). You may contact my supervisor or myself should you have any queries or questions you would like answered.

Yours faithfully

  
R. Sivnarain

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## **DECLARATION OF CONSENT BY PARTICIPANTS**

### **DECLARATION OF CONSENT**

I..... (full name of Participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and grant Mr R. Sivnarain permission to conduct his research. I am aware that I can withdraw from this research at any given time.

.....  
SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

.....  
DATE